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THIS IS THE DRAMATIC, UNINHIBITED ACCOUNT OF THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE AIR WAR IN THE PACIFIC AND OF THE MEN WHO FLEW THE SUPERFORTS, THE B-29'S OF GENERAL CURTIS LE MAY'S XXI BOMBER COMMAND, STRAIGHT TO THE HEART OF JAPAN.

Earl Snyder was a navigator on the B-29 *Umbriago—Dat's My Boy*, and took part in the first B-29 raid on Tokyo. But, he recalls nervously, his crew didn't drop their bombs on the Japanese capital, because at 29,000 feet the air was so cold that the bomb-release mechanism had frozen. "Umbriago" made it back to the base at Saipan with the fuel gauges registering "less than empty."

This is not a biography of General Le May—or "General Leemy," as the Japs called him—it's the story of the airmen who carried out his orders, flew the missions and lived or died without asking "too many questions."

*General Leemy's Circus* is a tribute to those men and, at the same time, an exciting record of their everyday lives. Writing with stark realism, Snyder hands the reader a share of the dangers and thrills, the devil-may-care, sometimes hilarious, adventures of men without women, and of the sordidness and the glory of air war.

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*General Leemy's Circus*



# General Leemy's Circus



A NAVIGATOR'S STORY OF THE 20th AIR FORCE  
IN WORLD WAR II

BY

Earl Snyder



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**FIRST EDITION**

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## PROLOGUE

The sun was gleaming down brightly on the huge, drab quonset that served as Major General Curtis E. LeMay's headquarters on hot, humid Guam. Major Ralph Nutter, a navigator in the XXI Bomber Command, stepped in the rear door and hustled to the general's office. Men with papers in their hands and harried expressions on their faces darted back and forth across the corridor in and out of rooms. Nutter hurried on, his attention only momentarily diverted from the mission he had in mind.

Quickly he grabbed off his floppy air force hat and stepped softly into a spacious office whose walls contained maps and charts with hundreds of multicolored pins sticking out and tens of different-hued tape streamers stretching hither and yon between them.

Behind the desk sat a stocky, well-built man with a round, almost cherubic face, a pointed, jowly chin and a hawklike, sharp nose. His face was tanned and hardened from the wind-whipping it had received in open-cockpit airplanes; the soft, yet foxlike eyes had a steely squint bordered by myriads of crow's-feet put there by peering anxiously into the black night searching hurriedly for the glint of moonlight on a wing or fuselage.

Major Nutter saluted sharply. "General, we need radar sets and we need them bad. And we need men to teach us how to use them better and how to maintain them. Some people around here tell me we can't get them because we don't have the money. If you got any confidence in what I'm trying to do, please try to get them for me."

The general slowly pulled his cigar out of his mouth. His penetrating eyes bored into Nutter. His thoughts were veiled, but he spoke slowly, deliberately, with authority: "Major, I know your problems. I want you to tell A-4 to get them and I'll worry about the money. I'll get an order out on it this afternoon."

That was General LeMay, famed World War II commanding general of the XXI Bomber Command. To the Japs in their English-speaking news broadcasts, he was "General Leemy."

He was the General Leemy who ran General Leemy's Circus.

To me, General LeMay is a fabulous military airman. Any general who tells an air-force major, as, it was related to me, LeMay once did, "Sit down, Major, that looks like damn poor leadership," has the makings of a unique personality. Any general whose creed, as expressed by a plaque over his desk in his office on Guam, was, "Will your proposition put more bombs on the target?" and who made that creed stick and, what is more important, made it work, has, to my mind, the makings of a unique personality. Any general whose men facetiously called him *Old Ironpants*, *The Cigar*, *General Leemy*, and other names unprintable, but none the less respected and admired him, has the makings of a unique personality. Any general who will take what is known in wartime as a calculated risk—a known bloodletting in which the progenitor stakes his reputation as a commander on the theory that the damage wrought on the enemy will more than justify the blood spilled—and comes out successfully time after time, has to me the makings of a unique personality.

Abraham Lincoln once said, in substance, "If I come out all right in the end, the things I have done reaching that end will not matter. If I come out wrong in the end, ten angels swearing that I did things right will not change matters any." LeMay must have had a soothsayer's knowledge of Lincoln's reasoning. He came out all right in the end. Other generals took calculated risks similar to LeMay's and they didn't come out all right in the end. They are not heroes.

I never knew, and still don't profess to know, what went on in the mind of LeMay. To attempt to fathom it would be a flight into the realm of pure conjecture. As a captain in his command I do know some of the things that happened to my friends and others that I fought and flew with. Those were the simple, untold incidents that make this book. Those were the flamboyant scenes and the somber realities, the tensed, nervous people, the

big, inert planes, the raucous merriment and the sober thought that make up the words that go into this story.

This is not LeMay's story, or a story about him. Only he can tell that adequately. This narrative is partly a history of B-29 Superfortresses and the way they were used in the air offensive against Japan. In these days of stratojet bombers, flying wings and cometlike jet-propelled fighters, the B-29 takes on, even after only a relatively short time, almost a semi-historical quality.

At the time the events humbly depicted in this yarn took place, B-29s were the hottest things in air combat. They were known in code as *Dreamboats*, and this was supposedly descriptive of the way others felt about them.

If, at times, this story seems like a patchwork quilt, bear in mind that life in combat was often of the same pattern. I will try to stick to facts as closely as humanly possible and I will try to keep prejudice, maudlin sentimentalism and fanciful flights into the dramatic out of this chronicle. A lot of water has passed under the bridge in the years since these events took place. Even such a relatively short space of time has dimmed my memory somewhat as to exact dates and incidents. Saipan in wartime was no place to pose as a third-string Boswell with notepad and pencil poised. I lived these incidents not to write of them, but, like a host of other men and women of my generation, because fate thrust them upon me.



*General Leemy's Circus*



# 1

## UMBRIAGO LEAPS

I stooped low and fondly patted the hard concrete apron. Jokingly, twelve other men followed suit, and someone wryly remarked, "It may be only California, but still it's the 'Newnited States.' God only knows that I hope we all live to see it again."

We were the combat crew of *Umbriago-Dat's My Boy*, a beautiful, huge, sleek B-29 Superfortress, and we were on our way to combat after months of mulling around here in the States. As for our plane—we thought there was none better; only a few short months before had technical experts, after many consultations and much rehashing with combat personnel, decided that the familiar, dull olive-drab covering that had been the mark of all Army Air Force aircraft need no longer be used. *Umbriago* shone like a pewter dollar in a mudhole, even under the very early morning California moonlight.

Our take-off from Mather Field near Sacramento, California was scheduled so that we would get to Honolulu a little before midmorning. Hence we had been told to report to the flight line at midnight, and take-off was scheduled as shortly thereafter as we could get ready and the weather cleared away so that we could get off C F R (contact flight rules).

We were thirteen men ready, even eager, but only one of us had any idea what we were ready and eager for. Bob Handler (not his correct name), a New Yorker, had flown twenty-five missions as a bombardier in the Eighth Air Force in Europe. He was the only one of us who had been to combat. He was the squadron bombardier and had been assigned to ride over with

the crew of *Umbriago* in order to get out to the theatre of operations. All the rest of us had a job to do.

When I was funneled into the slot as navigator, I knew I had a fairly rough job ahead of me. Kelley, the bombardier on the crew, but who, like myself, was rated both navigator and bombardier, had some good long laughs.

"Don't worry, brother," I countered weakly, "you're going to be up there shooting some stars for me. In fact, you do all the shooting and I'll plot the fixes." I rushed on before he had time to protest, "It's a deal."

I had flown out from our staging base in Kansas as a sandbagger on another crew, happy, content to just ride along and enjoy my flying for once. A working navigator gets very little time to enjoy flying; he is constantly working the computers, plotter, dividers, compass, sextants and other navigational paraphernalia that make up his tools. I had had time to look at the Rocky Mountains from the best viewpoint imaginable, to see Reno, Nevada and Salt Lake City, Utah as we had flown serenely along into California's murky weather. I had even had beautiful visions of a pleasant ocean-crossing to Hawaii—I would arrive there, not dog-tired from twelve or thirteen hours of work, but fresh enough to go out and see what made Honolulu tick.

But all that had been rudely shaken off when flight control had instructed me to "report at once for assignment to a combat crew."

I squawked! A man doesn't like a job as a furnace-tender in a luxury liner when he can go first class. It did no good. The overseas-operations officer told me, "I don't know what your previous overwater navigation experience has been, but a Pacific crossing is the best experience that a navigator can get."

He was right. And I didn't tell him that my previous overwater navigation experience was nil.

So I was assigned to *Umbriago—Dat's My Boy* vice (the Air Force always assigns you "vice" somebody else when you replace him) 2nd Lieutenant Herbert Post, who had let the medics at Mather Field catch him with a hernia. Post would have an opera-

tion and join us later at our destination. I rather suspected that he wasn't too bitterly disappointed at being held over. And I didn't blame him. He had been married just before he left Kansas, and this meant a little respite during which he could have his wife come out and enjoy an interlude of married life before he went overseas. . . .

I was *Umbriago's* navigator.

# 2

## UMBRIAGO SQUATS

Everything had been extremely hush-hush since the moment we hit Mather Field. We unofficially knew our destination—Saipan!—but no one even whispered it. Funny, the way we found out where we were going.

When the squadron commander talked to us prior to leaving our training base at Salina, Kansas, he had said, “I can’t tell you where we’re going, but I will tell you this. Several thousand Marines gave up their lives to take the island in the bloodiest Pacific battle yet. Their buddies are still out there on that island resting up for their next engagement. They’ve had it rough—plenty rough—and they deserve a lot of respect. We’re supposed to be a pretty hot outfit, but I don’t want any man shootin’ off his mouth to anybody over there about what we can do until we have proven ourselves.”

I think the C.O. had a good point there. One of the few good points he had in the year I knew him.

We scurried around to the latest magazines and finally settled on Saipan as being the only place which fit the description. Then we understood how these brand new B-29s were going to be used. We understood why we had made all the simulated bombing flights from Kansas to Cuba. It was the absolute maximum range for B-29s with a reasonable bomb load!

We understood a lot of things, but we still couldn’t understand where in the hell the commanding officer at Mather Field got the idea for as much secrecy as he had instituted. True enough, the B-29s were going to real combat for the first time,

and Uncle Sam wanted them as a surprise for Japan, but at Mather it seemed to us that Uncle Sam's nephew, Colonel Somebody-or-other, overdid it.

Our mail was strictly censored. We could not mention where we were or what we were doing; in fact, our topics were limited to greetings, the weather (but that had to be handled carefully, deftly) and I'm-fine-how-are-you stuff. No long distance calls—one officer was court-martialed for trying to sneak one out to his wife—and no leaving the airbase.

Possibly the greatest handicap was the no-leaving-the-base ban; and largely because we were unable to go into town and stock up on liquor to cache away in our plane. It would have come in mighty handy later to lighten our darker moments on Saipan. This important pre-take-off duty—procuring liquid spirits—was formerly accomplished by the Red Cross director at the field, may God bless him. But since the night that one combat crew had imbibed too freely and couldn't make it out of bed the next morning when they were surprised with instructions to go to Honolulu, the commanding officer had even stopped that.

We had a sneaking suspicion as we stood around *Umbriago* chatting easily, waiting tensely, that all the secretive restrictions imposed by this eager-beaver colonel were largely hogwash. Later events were to bear us out.

I stood there in the night talking to myself.

"Le' see now, the pilot's gonna fly the airways till we get to the coast, so no worries there. We pass right over 'Frisco—I wanna get a good look at the Golden Gate Bridge—then's when I begin to work. I'll take my departure from there—then we pass over this little island and kiss the U.S.A. goodbye. There are three ships stationed along our route about six hundred miles apart and I'll be able to tell whether we're on course or not by their radio. Between times, I'll shoot some two or three star fixes and do D.R. (dead-reckoning navigation). That should just about . . ."

Kelley thumped me on the back joyfully, and laughingly said,

"Snyder, you already act like you're flak-happy, and you haven't even left the States. Are ya worried?"

When I let my mouth fall ajar, preparing to speak what was on my mind, he slapped me on the back again. "Listen, I'll tell ya what I'll do. You navigate the first half of the trip while I get some sleep, then I'll relieve you while you get some, then you come back and bring us on in to Hawaii. Roger?"

"Brother, you're on. I'm not in such a hurry to be a hero that I won't share some of the joy of it with someone else. I'll wake you up about six or seven hours out and you can take over for a while."

But I was still worried. And the ditching discussions we had had while standing out on the ramp didn't help my frame of mind any. I felt, and probably justly so, that if we had to ditch because of some navigational difficulty I would undoubtedly be chopped into little pieces to bait the hooks and fishing lines with which each of the rubber liferafts was equipped. We had carefully explained, in the presence of each other, just what our duties were in case of ditching. Being the navigator, mine was to gather up all my navigational equipment and hie myself on the right wing into a liferaft. Handler, our *sandbagging* bombardier with twenty-five missions over Germany, was the only one who had never been straightened out as to just what he was to do in case we ditched. He had always seemed to prefer to stay in the club, shooting the breeze or sopping up a beer whenever we had our ditching confabs. I felt it in my bones that, if we ever had to ditch, friend Handler would trample over whales, sharks, men and B-29s getting into the liferaft. Fortunately, he was never put to the test.

Our briefing by ATC at Mather had been good—in fact, too good. We were told so much so explicitly that when it was over I was a little confused with all the data. I had a beautiful Loran set (an electronic navigation device) right behind me that would have helped considerably had I had more experience in using it. But then, even if I had, I couldn't have used it because there was

no maintenance personnel at Mather that knew how to calibrate it for use in the Pacific. Then, too, I had a radar scope right in front of me. With it I should have been able to see an island at night through an undercast at least half an hour before I could see it with the naked eye. But nobody was too sure of it either.

"Sherm," I asked Lieutenant Sherman Wantz, the radar operator, "do you think we can get some use out of the radar set?"

"I dunno, Earl," he replied, shaking his head woefully, "it's been acting up lately, and I'm afraid we can't depend on it too much."

The B-29 was equipped with the finest, most modern equipment in the world, but we just hadn't had enough time to learn how to maintain and use it properly. I mentally patted my sextant (navigational device for shooting stars) affectionately.

"What's holding us up?" I asked the pilot when he walked by me about the fiftieth time.

"Weather—the usual stuff. Just as soon as the field clears up we'll be off like a herd of turtles. Why? You gettin' anxious?"

"Well, I'd just as soon be on my way as sitting around here. By the way, let's hit altitude before we get to 'Frisco so that I can start out 'even Stephen.'"

"O.K.," the pilot replied, as a jeep drove up. He walked over to the jeep.

When he came back a few minutes later, he said, "O.K., men, we're cleared for take-off—let's get aboard. Is everything else in the plane? We don't wanna leave anything, because there is no forwarding service. You've got your feet on U.S. soil for the last time in quite a while, so enjoy it for a few seconds."

San Francisco was beautiful as we passed over it; I still don't know whether it was the Golden Gate Bridge or the Treasure Island one, but whichever one it was, it left you with a lot of lights strung out in a long line in your mind's eye.

I settled down over my desk in the blackness as I heard the pilot call into the radio on the little island. "Code red, code red,

this is one-nine-six-four-seven. We are now over your station, altitude eight thousand feet, airspeed one-nine-five. We are checking out."

"Roger, one-nine-six-four-seven, this is code red. Checking out and good luck."

*Umbriago's* motors whirred on sweetly. It was warm, I was comfortable, I was at a desk with a nice gooseneck lamp, and all I had to do was get seventy tons of airplane and thirteen people to Hawaii. I turned to my compass for solace and direction, and it gave me both.

Some five or six hours after we left the coast I woke Kelley. "She's all yours. You can find our latest position and time from the map and the log. There are benzedrine tablets on the table, if you get sleepy. I'm going to crawl up in this tunnel and get some shut-eye myself."

Kelley reluctantly rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and yawned lazily. He didn't appear too eager to move up to the desk. With a few persuasive tugs, I convinced him it was the proper thing to do.

Sleep came to me easily, quickly, with the low drone of the motors and my fatigue. . . .

The sunlight streaming through the astro-dome into the tunnel awakened me hours later. Kelley looked up happily, grinned broadly and threw up his hands in mock despair.

"We're lost!" he shouted.

But it wasn't long until the main island of the Hawaiian group—Oahu—loomed into view.

In the gray-blue haze of the distant horizon, it jutted out of the placid, green Pacific like a rough-cut diamond in a tourmaline setting. Lazily, a few large, heavy birds winged by the window near my desk and rolled over prettily, down out of view. I wondered if they were Hawaiian harbingers of good or evil, like the albatross in the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

As we descended nearer the Pacific's surface, its green took on a lighter hue and the gentle swells rolled high and then dis-

sipated themselves into swirling, eddying whitecaps and large air bubbles. Tossed about on the crest of the swells, then plunged down into the depths of their troughs, was debris of one sort or another; pieces of wood, sides of boxes, wooden crates and cartons—all the flotsam and jetsam of an ocean, and the backwash of Hawaii.

I found it difficult to believe that less than three short years before this had been a scene of utter confusion and chaos, of gross unpreparedness and stark reality, of swift death and quick heartrending tragedy. Its security and safety today belied its vulnerability on December 7, 1941.

The familiar landmarks came up—Coco-head and Diamond-head promontories, then Waikiki Beach, which looked rather small from our altitude. We flew low over many ships in the harbor, turned in, heard the co-pilot's happy "wheels and flaps coming down" break the stillness and the pilot set her down a mite roughly on John Rodgers Field's long east-west runway.

We were as far as Hawaii, at least.

# 3

## FLAT-CHESTED WOMEN

ATC (Air Transport Command), which had charge of us from the time we landed at California until we got to Saipan, had innumerable restrictions.

All our mail was censored, we had to eat at such-and-such a place, to drink nothing stronger than beer—and, worst of all, there was no leaving the base. How one outfit could think up so many restrictions was beyond us. So many restrictions invited escape and, true to form, ATC had no means of enforcing them. There was no need for them, anyhow. Immediately Handler and I headed for Honolulu. We merely walked out the gate at the edge of the base and caught a bus for Honolulu.

The town was infested with droves of flat-chested women, the like of which I had never seen previously. They looked about as inviting as the average adolescent boy in high school. After a few lousy drinks in several different bars in downtown Honolulu, we made posthaste for Waikiki Beach. . . .

We had no idea where to go when we got there and we knew no one who could tell us. We were out strictly for fun for this was to be our last fling in a civilized town before we got out in the sticks. When the driver told us we were paralleling Waikiki, we got off at some little side street that didn't look too promising.

It was the best we could conjure up at the moment.

We started pell-mell for the beach, when we spied a short distance off to our right a number of tables around which a lot of army and navy and marine officers and a few rather attractive native girls were gathered—and on which appeared to be bever-

ages of alcoholic content. We walked no farther; suddenly we felt tired.

This spot proved to be a small hostelry—the Willard Inn—lately taken over by the army and serving real honest-to-God whiskey drinks. They had a rather novel idea for the serving of the drinks, too. No orders were asked—waiters circulated constantly with trays full of drinks. The patron merely grabbed off the number of drinks he desired along with the mixer and threw some change on the tray in their places. Out in those parts whiskey was whiskey, no questions asked. It struck me as an excellent way to throw off the cares of the day.

A five-piece native band enthusiastically beat out island rhythms on several leather-covered hollow logs and assorted other nondescript instruments. It was the sort of thing that drove you to drink more and more in self-defense. We defended ourselves.

My attention was finally drawn to an unusually attractive native lass who sat with a table full of naval officers. She had a cocoa-colored skin, sparkling brown eyes and coal-black wavy hair. Her cheeks were smooth and round. Her lips were full and pouted with all the suggestive wickedness of the proverbial South-Sea-island belle. Her body bespoke a lithe suppleness that came from generations of toiling, athletic ancestors. Her breasts were round and full and up-pointed. She was an incorrigible little flirt, I guessed, as she sat there with her soft, shapely legs crossed.

Secretly, out of the corner of my eye, I watched her as she cast her impish glances toward a tall, bronzed marine officer who sat at a distant table bandying words with his marine friends and eyeing her interestedly.

“Careful, buddy,” Handler cautioned me, “you’re a married man, y’know.”

“Yeah, I know it,” I replied, without turning my head. “Watch this,” I gestured slightly. “Something’s gonna pop in a minute. Either the marines are gonna land and get the situation well in hand, or else the navy is gonna loose a broadside salvo.”

In the flick of an eyelash, the brown beauty's hand darted down ever so quickly to slide her dress up slightly over her knees. She gave a coy glance toward the marine officer and smiled surreptitiously but broadly.

Her naval escort, who had been engrossed in conversation with his fellow officers and had momentarily forgotten his date, happened to glance about at her and saw this bit of coy byplay. At the same time, the crafty marine's hot-breath nerves had had all that a combat soldier, who had just returned from a barren island, could stand. He probably hadn't laid eyes on a woman in a year or more. The alcohol in his veins caused him to let the bars down and toss caution to the four winds. He got up quickly and strode defiantly over to the table where the little flirt sat, apparently to ask her to dance. The eyes of the marine and the navy man met and sparks gapped the distance as though the two figures were mere antennae of a gigantic electrical experiment.

"For Chris' sake, Snyder, hold on to your drink. This is gonna be a free-for-all!" Handler half-whispered.

I clutched my glass tightly and sat back to watch the second greatest fight on earth—that of two men for a woman.

The naval officer rose, a little unsteadily, to his feet. The girl slunk lower in her chair.

Coolly the marine said, "I'd like to dance with your girl." His eyes were steady and level.

Just as coolly and evenly, and with a hard glint in his eyes, the sailor replied, "Have ya asked her?"

"No, but I think I will." Then looking at the girl, he grinned, "May I have this dance?"

To my utter astonishment and probably to the marine's also, she replied, "No, thank you," in almost perfect English.

"Now go back and sit down and stay there," the sailor barked.

In a flash, the marine's fist darted out and caught the sailor flush on the cheek. The sailor fell back on the table, recoiled like a panther dealt a heavy cuff by the paw of a bear, and lashed out with both fists. The melee began in a sabrelike slashing of khaki arms and knotted brown fists.

This was not my fight. I sat quietly and watched.

The other sailors at the table jumped up with catlike agility and pounced on the marine, while the marines from the table from which their fighter had come bounced across the concrete floor like gamecocks. They grabbed for their marine friend and pinned his arms to his sides. "C'mon, break it up, ya goddam fool! Didn't you get all the fightin' out of your system on that island?"

"What the hell's the matter with ya, are ya nuts?" someone in the tight-pressed crowd asked of the sailor. "Sit down, and let's cut this kid stuff out."

The native waiters scurried around like half-frightened mice.

Out of nowhere two burly M.P.s and a big shore patrolman appeared. There was a lengthy discussion in muffled tones. Gradually the group relaxed, and slowly, reluctantly it drew apart. Finally, the angry marine was half-dragged back to his table, protesting violently. Suddenly and scowling, the sailor sat down.

The scene once again became one of quiet drinking, frenzied native drum-beating and jerky, rapid, pulsating dancing.

The native beauty flirted no more!

For us the climax came when we had finished off a couple of filet mignons in the adjoining restaurant. As we sat there smoking, a captain walked up to the cashier just behind Handler. When he started talking, Handler looked around cautiously, then jumped up quickly and held out his hand. The two greeted each other jovially. We had found someone who knew something about this town and who might help.

Handler brought him over to the table and introduced him. His first words were welcome.

"Waiter, take these drinks away and bring these men some scotch and sodas."

Here was a man worth knowing better.

When the first salutations were over and we had settled down to talking, he told us how he happened to be here.

"I was back at Fort Riley, Kansas, when General Richardson

needed someone to run the recreation camps here. Richardson and the commanding general here were old army cronies. Somehow the two of them got together, and my commander, knowing that my wife was an army nurse here on Oahu, asked me if I wanted to give this job a try. I replied, 'Hell, yes—sir,' and so I got the job. I have charge of the Doris Duke estate and four hotels, including this one."

He hesitated an instant and a look of sudden discovery crept over his face.

"Say, what are you fellas doing tonight? I have an apartment here. We can have a few drinks."

It was the best—in fact, the only—proposition we had received, so we graciously accepted.

I wasn't quite prepared, however, when we got over to the apartment and he pulled out a bottle of very fine bonded bourbon and an equally fine bottle of excellent scotch. It was a hell of a nice way to fight a war, if I am permitted an observation.

# 4

## STINKING “KWAJ”

Dirty, stinking Kwajalein was a hellhole, if one ever existed. The trouble with it was that it had received so many bombs and so much shelling during its capture that it was just one damn, big shellcrater.

The officer that met us when we landed told us, “We took a herd of bulldozers and scraped dead Japs, tree stumps, debris and everything else up in one corner of the island.”

Not neat, but effective when you have to get runways quickly cleared.

I hadn’t been on this god-forsaken island thirty minutes when I spied a slightly familiar, droopy, tall figure shuffling across a small cleared area. It was an old college crony whom I hadn’t seen in six years. An odd place to see him now. His name was Bill Hunter—“Hambone,” as I had nicknamed him in college—and he was air corps supply officer on the atoll. After we had dined on some warmed-up C-rations, we repaired to what someone had mistakenly called the “Officers’ Club” to reminisce over a can of lukewarm beer and some potato chips.

“Yeah,” he told me, “you can write anything from here. The Japs know all about it anyhow. We’ve had one airplane and crew here twenty-one days waiting for parts. Night before last Tokyo Rose, in her nightly broadcast, told us the names and ranks of all the crew members. A few nights before that Major Morgan, who flew that B-17, the ‘Memphis Belle,’ was through here in his B-29, and Tokyo Rose came on the radio and said, ‘Come on out to Saipan, Major Morgan, you can’t fight the war from Kwajalein.’

When you people first started coming through here you were labeled top-secret; now you're not even secret."

I was ready to go back to the States, *toute suite*—but I had another beer. Where did Tokyo Rose get all her information? Before I had even come out she had probably had me all catalogued, my background and experiences written up and ticketed for putting away on a certain date. I consoled myself with the thought that there were undoubtedly a couple of experiences in Kansas City she didn't know about!

Just to make conversation, I asked, "Hambone, you're not married, are ya?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I got married while I was stationed up at Westover Field in Massachusetts."

Hunter, from my recollection of college days, was no Lothario. I could only imagine what his wife looked like, and it wasn't very complimentary.

"As a matter of fact," he continued, "I got a picture of her here in my billfold."

He quickly pulled the billfold from the inner recesses of his hindmost pocket. I was prepared to pass some complimentary remark about a girl with a face and figure that only a mother could love.

He held the billfold up for my gaze. My eyes almost bugged out of their sockets, for there, in a snapshot, was a gorgeous platinum blonde with a figure and face to match. My, my, I speculated, how the service broadens one!

I went back to my bed and wrote my wife a letter. Two beers were all I could stand that night.

They pulled us out of bed early the next morning for a briefing.

"Now, when you come into Saipan," the briefing officer droned, "you wanna fly to this exact point here (indicating a map). It's five miles off the southeast tip. Radio in from there, the code name for the tower is 'Buttercup,' and tell 'em who you are. If you don't, you're liable to get shot at. They're still havin' air raids there and they're a little trigger-happy. They don't give

a damn if you're a red-hot B-29 or a Cub; if you don't come to this point, radio in and fly a prescribed pattern, they're liable to open up on you. They don't know who's up in that plane, so they're not takin' any chances."

A bald-headed colonel, the ATC commander there, nodded in agreement. I looked at him and silently wondered whose toes he had trod on to be consigned to this hellhole. I surmised that he must have been shanghaied, for no man in the good graces of the powers-that-be would ever permit himself to be sent to a place like this.

The briefing officer went on. "The weather looks pretty good. You may hit a 'front' (bad weather) about an hour out of Saipan, but it shouldn't be rough. It's not a bad trip from here on out. About three hundred miles from here you'll pass by Eniwetok. Don't radio in there, unless you're in trouble. Just keep right on flying till you get to destination. Here's a hack (correct time)."

When we got outside, the pilot said, "Snyder, I'm gonna fly formation with a couple fellows out of the 500th Group. It will be good practice for me, and if any of us get in trouble there will be two more to help out."

"O.K. by me. If we're flying on a wing I won't have to do much navigation."

"Do you think you can hit that exact spot five miles off the southeast tip?" he asked, smiling.

"Brother, when you get within sight of Saipan, I'm gonna get my dividers out, mark off an angle that subtends five miles and sight along one arm of 'em. When we hit the spot I'll yell 'turn,' and you start flying the prescribed pattern to get us in without getting shot up."

"O.K." He laughed.

About an hour out of Kwajalein I noticed that we were beginning to lag behind the other two planes.

"Pilot from navigator," I called over the interphone, "what's the trouble? Why are we dropping back? If we keep this up I'm gonna have to go to work. Lemme know, over."

"Give me a heading to Eniwetok," he replied. "We're losing

oil in the number two engine, the flight engineer says. I think we better go into Eniwetok instead of trying to limp on to Saipan, over."

"O.K., just a minute."

I hadn't been keeping track of our position too well, but I managed to scrape up something that would pass for one and called back, "Turn to a heading of two-four-six degrees."

When we reached Eniwetok we had a couple of small problems to consider. First and foremost was the matter of the length of the runway, and the second was the weight that the runway could hold. Eniwetok was even smaller than "Kwaj" and the runway was surfaced with coral not meant to bear the weight of a B-29 loaded with gasoline. When we called into the tower they gave us the runway length. The pilot thought we could squeeze in all right, but he wasn't sure about the weight. In any event we decided to circle awhile with a rich power setting so that we could use up some of the gasoline. The pilot pushed the mixture controls full forward, set the auto-pilot so that we would circle the island and we sat 'er out for a couple of hours. It was one of the easier ways to draw your flying pay.

We had no way of knowing, but we were the first B-29 to come to Eniwetok, and the atoll below us was much agog with the possibility of our landing there. When we came in for the landing the runway was lined on either side with sailors eager for their first look at this big new bird.

I closed out my log and moved up forward on the flight deck between the pilot and co-pilot. The runway stretched out below and in front of us, gleaming white as only coral can gleam in the hot, steaming Southwest Pacific, a singular and relatively short runway rising abruptly out of the ocean like a tall, straight Taj Mahal. I made a mental note that if a plane came in too low over the end of the runway and caught its nosewheel, there would be hell to pay.

The pilot struggled heavily with the controls, throwing the wheel on the control column first this way and then that in an

attempt to keep the plane on an even keel in the eddying air currents over the cool ocean and the hot runway.

"By golly, that's a mighty short runway for a B-29. Can you squeeze it in there all right?" I asked the pilot anxiously.

"Yeah, but I gotta get the wheels on the ground pretty close to this end to do it." He turned to the co-pilot and shouted, "Call off the airspeed for me and keep a close watch on the end of the runway. When we get over it, tell me how high you estimate we are."

"Roger," the co-pilot said.

We descended at a slow, lumbering pace. The pilot wanted to keep it slow as that he wouldn't have too much flying speed to dissipate when he reached the runway. I watched the ocean come up to meet us. The huge breakers raced swiftly in toward the steep sides of Eniwetok and careened heavily against the brittle coral. The white, foamy bubbles swirled and eddied and were thrown back into the oncoming swells. It was a sight that might have warmed the heart of a salty sailor, but it left me cold and unimpressed.

The co-pilot began calling out the airspeed, his eyes darting quickly from the instrument panel to the runway ahead and back.

"One sixty—one fifty—one forty-seven—one forty—one thirty-five—one thirty-three—one twenty-five—one fifteen—one ten—you're about ten feet above the runway."

We passed swiftly over the end of the coral atoll. The pilot jerked the throttles full-closed and fought the control column savagely. He jockeyed the rudder pedals rapidly back and forth with his feet. Slowly we levelled off until, suddenly, with a long drop and a heavy bounce, *Umbriago* hit the runway hard. The Superfort leaped into the air like a demon possessed. I dropped quickly to one knee, at the same time grabbing the arm rests on the pilot's and co-pilot's seats to brace myself.

The pilot hit the throttles hard and the four huge engines caught on with a full-throated roar. At the same time he worked the control column back and forth rapidly and held the rudder

pedals steady with his feet. He jerked the throttles closed when he realized he again had full control of the plane and had enough flying speed to ease it down on the runway. Amid a tremendous screeching of tires, the heavy Superfort settled slowly and haughtily, almost with an angry shake of its fuselage and a flouncy toss of its high tail.

"We lost a lotta rubber that time," I grinned impishly.

"You ain't kiddin', son," the pilot replied, without taking his eyes off the runway. A slow smile spread over his face. "But we made it, didn't we?"

"That was a damn poor exhibition to put on for these sailors," Kelley offered.

"Yeah, I'll probably never hear the last of it."

He bore down hard on the brakes and *Umbriago* slowed quickly to a more easily controllable pace. He advanced the throttles on the two right-hand engines and the plane turned abruptly on its left wheel. We pulled off the end of the runway without effort, taxied quickly to a parking space and the pilot enthusiastically cut the engines.

The crowd gathered quickly as we got out. The eager sailors swarmed around us quickly for a closer look at this new, publicized airplane. They scampered up to us and gawked like farmboys seeing their first skyscraper. They asked questions of no one in particular, probably of each other, and they made statements.

"Does she fly all right?"

"How does she ride, easy?"

"Man, look at those guns. If you can't knock the Japs down with them, nothin' will."

"Christ, how I'd like to take a ride over Tokyo in that baby."

"She's got class, all right."

"Do ya know what the navy calls her in code? 'Dreamboat,' and by golly she is sure enough."

I was pleased with their attention to us and to our plane, but I felt myself being slowly squeezed into oblivion against the nose wheel and I fancied myself a bloody casualty before I even got to

Saipan. I threw my weight against the pressing crowd and nudged my shoulder upward swiftly to get room and to try to break through into the open. It was a vain effort.

The navy finally set up a public-address system, warning everyone in blaring and authoritative tones to move away and stay away from the plane to at least a distance of twenty feet. The crowd reluctantly pushed away, still staring wide-eyed and still talking pell-mell, harum-scarum.

I knew I was going to like this island when a Seabee officer hopped briskly out of a jeep he had parked about seventy-five feet away, strode over to where I was standing and wondering what my next move was going to be, and said, gesturing, "Captain, I have the only fresh-water shower on the island down at my quarters. You're welcome to use it, if you like. If there's anything else you want, just let me know and I'll try to get it for you. Our club's open at 1330 (1:30 P.M.) and you're welcome there. We have plenty of beer, whiskey and coke. Make yourself at home."

It was almost too much, though, when he apologized for the lack of scotch at the club. It seems that they had run out the day before and hadn't had time to restock.

I steeled myself to the no-scotch condition and prepared for the likes of some cold beer and mere bourbon and coke.

Really—what price glory?

# 5

## I SAY, MATE!

Eniwetok was a beautiful little island well kept by the navy. It was typical of the contrast of the navy with the air force, if you compared it to Kwajalein. Kwajalein was an air-force island. Food was poor, living conditions were poor and recreational facilities were poor. When the air force moved in, its primary object was to get planes in and out on schedule; living was secondary. By comparison, the navy, once it had secured an island, seemed to be primarily interested in enjoying life on it. They did that to the fullest extent. The navy had ample ships on which it could store and transport building materials, food, drink, ice-making machinery and the like; the air force had only airplanes, and they were not allotted to handling those supplies. The navy had the Seabees, whose primary mission was construction. The air force had their engineer troops, whose primary mission was construction—of runways and air depots and maintenance buildings. I was to learn, in months to come, even more forcefully the difference between the navy and the air force in this respect.

But at the moment my chief worries were a shower, getting cleaned up, and the officers' club. I discovered how fleeting fame can be when, a few minutes after we were on the ground, a four-engined C-54 cracked up and burned on the end of the runway while landing. The crowd left us posthaste for the newer excitement.

I accepted the Seabee officer's offer of a fresh-water shower. A shower in salt water leaves you with a sticky, gummy feeling.

We were housed in a quonset hut on the edge of the atoll farthest away from the officers' club. Nothing fancy about the quarters, but they were considerably roomier than those we were given on Kwajalein. The food was excellent, served at a four-man table with white tablecloths and by colored mess boys; not C-ration, but honest-to-goodness roast beef we ate that evening. It was quite a difference from the stand-in-line, eat-on-a-wooden-bench, C-ration meal at Kwajalein the evening before.

When ice cream was brought to the table for dessert, some wag in the crowd remarked, "They probably use the propeller screw off a battleship to stir up their ice cream."

The walk to the club was long and made doubly difficult by the almost ankle-deep shifting sand of which the atoll was partly composed. The navy had built three beautiful cement tennis courts at the water's edge and had enclosed them with wire netting. They were all busy, as we walked by, with sailors waiting to use the courts when the present occupants had vacated them. Nothing deterred us from the straight path to the club, beer and ice.

We sauntered into the club casually as though we belonged there, even owned a piece of the place; I was slightly piqued when no one paid us the slightest bit of attention. Everyone was too engrossed in partaking of the late evening refreshment to bother with strangers. We dropped our nondescript air force chapeaux in the pile of well-braided, but salt-tarnished navy hats and proceeded joyfully to the bar.

After securing our libations we went out on the screen-enclosed porch which lay only a few feet from the ocean. This, I thought, is from heaven; a cool drink, the ocean breeze and rest. I was brought up short by a raucous voice of some sailor who shouted, "You boys from that B-29?" And before we had a chance to nod, "Come on over and have a drink on an old salt who commands a tub."

You never saw an air force man who turned down a drink. Well, hardly ever, anyway.

Let it be said here and now that the navy could outdrink any living thing, animal, mineral or vegetable, walking, crawling or flying. This old salt and his two companions were true to navy tradition as they kept the drinks coming for them and us. Time flew by as the old fellow related to us that he had better than twenty years in the navy as an enlisted seaman before the war had come along and made him an officer. He had been around, and he referred to us all as "mate."

"Mate," he said, "you couldn't get me in one of those flying contraptions for all the money in the world. No, sir, mate, give me a tub and I'll take her any place through anything, but I wouldn't even step my foot inside an airplane. They're dangerous."

Nature prevented me from listening to more. Beer only made a short stop in my stomach when I drank it. I ambled out to the building that some sailor had pointed out to me as being the proper place. . . .

On my way out of the building after finishing my chore, I was horror-stricken to notice that the door contained the notice, "Ladies." In the first place, I couldn't imagine the need for a ladies' restroom on an island inhabited entirely by men, and I wondered what wishful-thinking individual had built it there. In the second place, I speculated about whether or not anyone happened to see me go in or out. I didn't want to get tagged, even among strangers, as a man who frequented ladies' toilets. When I got back to the club, I sidled up to the bar, beckoned to the bartender, looked carefully around and furtively whispered, "Say, didn't know you had a ladies' restroom here. I got in one by mistake. Didn't have any idea I was wrong until after I got out. What's the story?"

He must have been able to see that I was worried, because he broke out in a roaring laugh. "Ho-ho-ho! That's a good one. Somebody is always doin' that. Strangers never know that we have such a place. Occasionally, we have a boat come in that has some nurses on it. When we do, the ladies' restroom gets used legitimately. We had three or four nurses in here about a

month ago. Last time the place has had any legitimate use. Think nothing of it."

Considerably relieved physically, after my trip to the "head," as the navy called it, and mentally, after my reassuring conversation with the bartender, I returned to our table and sat down as unobtrusively as possible. That was a mistake, a gruesome mistake! The old salt thundered, "Where ya been, mate? Out to the head?"

When I silently nodded yes, he roared, "By God, I think I'll go there myself. How do ya get out there? Show me the way, will ya, mate?"

Deciding that for once the air force should assert itself, even if it was enjoying the hospitality of the navy club, I shouted, "Mate, the bartender'll show ya the way." And for good measure I added boldly, "For Chris' sake, don't get in the ladies' restroom like I did. Being a navy man yourself, they might court-martial you."

Laughing uproariously, he hurried out the door.

The night wore on and the drinks wore well. They finally poured us out of the club when they closed it at eleven o'clock.

Never have I seen an atoll sway so much as I did getting back to our quonset hut that night. The ocean must have been rough.

# 6

## SAIPAN OR BUST!

Bad weather en route to Saipan gave us many anxious moments. The closer we got, the less I worked. Shortly before my ETA was up we ran into thick, turbulent clouds. We could see nothing, and our B-29 was tossed around like a toy battleship in a child's bath. We were still in this soup when my ETA ran out and, according to me, we were over Saipan. Any way it turned out, I stood to be a bum in the crew's eyes. I could visualize my being correct, our being over Saipan, and suddenly the clouds breaking for a moment. We hadn't flown the prescribed traffic pattern, we were an unidentified plane, they would shoot us down like dogs. An ignominious ending! I could imagine my being wrong, that we were right or left or short of Saipan. We could flounder around aimlessly and finally wind up in the ocean. It would be all my fault; a million-dollar plane wasted, lives lost, perhaps, people injured.

I went forward on the flight deck to where the pilot and co-pilot were sitting and tried to get a glimpse of any land that would orient me. I wished fervently that I were anything except a navigator. I searched wildly. The radio compass was tuned on the Saipan frequency, the one that had been given us at Kwajalein. In that turbulent weather the needle hunted back and forth rapidly like a long, bony finger attempting to ferret out a needle's eye. It gave me no accurate indication. Further than that, we were not assured that the radio compass would be accurate even under ideal conditions. We were cautioned not to rely on it be-

cause the Japs might jam it or bend it. I was deeply worried and I puffed cigarettes in an endless chain.

Suddenly we broke out of the soup and flew into the fresh, clean sunlight, but the only thing in sight was water. Not the faintest glimmer of any sort of land. I didn't know what to tell the crew to do. We just flew on in the same direction, hoping for the best. I inquired of the flight engineer about our gasoline supply. He smiled wryly and replied, "We're getting a little low, but I'm not sure exactly how much we have. I'd have to transfer some first. If we don't hit land in another few minutes, I'm going to start transferring."

A B-29 eats gas at a pretty rapid rate. I had the radar man keeping a sharp lookout on his scope for what might look like land. The clouds caused him considerable trouble; a good-sized cloud shows on a radar scope just like a small island.

I was in a spot and I knew it. I did some fast praying, the first of many fast prayers I was to say in the next six months. But we continued to fly on and see nothing but water. We were in and out of clouds and consequently alternated between smooth and rough flying. The radio compass continued to hunt back and forth rapidly. We were down to about a thousand feet over the water. I had a sick feeling in my stomach. I felt certain that we had flown beyond Saipan and were headed in the general direction of Asia, the Philippines or some such place. I was low. The crew's estimation of me sank to about the same level. We flew on.

After what seemed an interminable period, the radar man said over the interphone, "Snyder, I believe I have some sort of an island on the scope. About one o'clock at twelve miles. I'm not certain because we've been getting so many false returns—clouds and the like. Turn your scope on and see what you think."

Hopefully I did so, and when the set warmed up I anxiously scanned the picture it gave, first turning up the intensity and then turning it down. I tried everything I knew to bring in the picture more clearly. Finally, in desperation and disappointment, I realized that I was not getting any place; I could tell no more than could the radar man. It was either a cloud up ahead or an

island. But it wasn't shaped like Saipan. I continued to watch the radar scope and the radio compass carefully, at the same time cursing my misfortune. We flew on.

We had been told at our briefing at Kwajalein that wherever we saw a lone, high cloud formation built up, we were likely to find an island underneath. This was due to the difference in heat absorption and radiation between land and water. I kept careful watch ahead for such a cloud formation. I spied what I thought might be one and hopefully pointed it out to the pilot and co-pilot. We flew on.

As we got closer, I could discern the dim outline of some land, but what land I knew not. It could be Guam, Saipan, Tinian or an uncharted island beyond. It could be Jap-held. We were still far from safe. We flew on toward it and the pilot began calling the code name for the Saipan tower. Strangely enough they acknowledged our call.

I interrupted on the interphone long enough to remind, "We've got some pattern instructions to follow if this is Saipan."

The pilot replied, "Roger, Snyder, let me know when we reach the point where we're to start turning."

As we came closer, the Saipan signal came in more clearly. I felt considerably encouraged, but I was far, far from assured that the island we were approaching was Saipan. My ETA had been up fifteen or twenty minutes and I didn't see how I could possibly be that far off.

Thoughts raced through my mind like a speeding train through a darkened tunnel. What if this were a Jap island a little beyond Saipan or to its north or south? Suppose the Japs had somehow got hold of the Saipan radio-tower frequency and set up a station of their own on the same frequency? I visualized the air around us heavy with flak as we approached near enough to this island to begin the traffic pattern. Once we were that close at such a low altitude and flying so slowly there would be no escaping destruction if the Japs threw enough ack-ack at us. We would disintegrate in a shower of high octane gasoline.

These thoughts assailed me as we flew on to what I earnestly

hoped and wishfully believed was Saipan. I dared not express my thoughts for fear of implanting imaginary fears in the minds of the crew.

Nonetheless, we flew on toward the island. There was little else to do. As we drew nearer, I strained my eyes almost from their sockets trying to see something that would fix definitely in my mind that this was Saipan or at least an American-held island. Ahead and below there were hundreds of naval craft of all sizes lying at anchor and a few smaller boats darting hither and yon among them leaving white, foamy, curling wakes in the blue-green water. I looked, half expecting to see flame shooting from the muzzles of the guns that studded the decks of the larger vessels. But all was peaceful and serene as we roared in.

Suddenly, I remembered that if this was Saipan we had to fly a prescribed pattern upon nearing it. I scurried quickly back to my desk and hooked on my throat mike and earphones.

"Pilot from Navigator, over."

I searched hurriedly in a half frenzy for the pattern instructions and compared them with the map before me.

"Navigator from Pilot, go ahead."

I looked out my window ahead trying to determine by guess-work—the best means I had at hand—if we had reached the prescribed turning point. I judged that if we weren't at it, we were awfully near, and, deciding to err on the safe side if error was inevitable, I called, "Pilot from Navigator, begin your turn into the pattern now, over."

"Roger, Navigator." And we wheeled over sharply on our right side and lay into the turn. I was still not certain this was Saipan, but I was silently praying it was.

We came closer to the island and the ships began to look more and more like the silhouettes that characterized United States Navy vessels. I began to relax a bit.

As we flew low over the ships I could see the sailors standing on the decks pointing up at us and waving friendly greetings. I knew then, at last, that we were all right, and I breathed again a heavy sigh of relief.

On the island itself there were ample signs of destruction, with here and there some temporary repairs where, apparently, the American forces had decided to put to use a partially destroyed building. There was one large hill (which I was later to learn was famed Mount Topatchau) covered with brown and green foliage. The long B-29 runways were just barely visible. Sparsely spotted around were a few, very few, B-29s. Tinian lay off to the right just a few miles, but it was barren with no sign of life.

We wheeled over to the left, continuing to follow the pattern that had been given us. The co-pilot called out happily, "Wheels and flaps coming down," and we turned in on the landing approach.

We were not the center of any group of idle curiosity seekers as we followed the jeep that took us to our hard coral parking space just off the runway.

The pilot cut the engines as we filed down the ladder onto Saipan soil. There were only two marines to meet us, the first of many to try to sell us some Japanese souvenirs. But at last we had arrived where combat began, and that is what we had been feverishly preparing for, anxiously waiting for and avidly hoping for!

# 7

## IT'S A STRUGGLE

"Man, we've been looking for you. Where've you been? We've had a mission to Tokyo scheduled two days straight and we're supposed to go out again tomorrow."

Partly because I meant it, and partly because my informant had made his statement sound as if he thought I was afraid to go, I said, "Good, maybe we can get on it. I'd sure as hell like to be on the first B-29 raid on Tokyo."

The pilot and I immediately began to check around to see if we could, by any chance, get on the first raid.

"Naw," the maintenance officer told us, "we gotta strip your plane for combat, give it a thorough check, calibrate some of the instruments—it'll take us too long to get it ready for tomorrow. Wotta you guys so eager about, anyway?"

We didn't give up. A trip to the squadron commander netted us a little hope when, in reply to our query, he gave us a quick, "You sure as hell can go. We wanna get all the planes over the target that we possibly can."

After we asked him if he would tell the maintenance officer that we could go, he slowed down suddenly. "Wait a minute. If the maintenance officer says he can't get the plane ready, that's different. No plane, no go."

We were beaten; but we felt better when the mission was canceled late that night.

It was rescheduled for the following day and I immediately set about to wangle my way on it. I spent most of the morning learning what planes were scheduled to go and checking with

the pilots to see if any of them needed a navigator or could use a "sandbagger." I was reduced to the ignominious, hateful role of a sandbagger, finally. My luck was bad—extremely bad. Everyone else wanted to go on the mission, and certainly none of the navigators were intending to miss it. Further than that, with a completely unknown quantity coming up, no one seemed to want to carry along an extra man who might get in the way in case of emergency.

I tracked down Ed Rose, pilot of a B-29 scheduled for the mission, and talked to him like a Dutch uncle.

"Ed, I don't wanna miss this mission. I gotta get on it. How about letting me squeeze on your plane?"

"Earl, I'd like to let you go, but we're liable to wind up in trouble and you wouldn't be much help. You even might be sorry you went along," he replied.

"Honest to goodness, Ed, if you let me go along, I'll stay out of the way. Hell, I'll even spell the navigator, and on a mission as long as that he can use it."

Reluctantly, he finally acquiesced. "Well, O.K., but don't say I didn't warn you. It's your funeral."

He didn't need to tell me that. I knew it.

The headquarters quonset hut sat right beside the operations quonset and the intelligence-and-supply quonset. In order to get the personnel of the squadron quickly, a public-address system had been set up in the headquarters quonset. At such times when it wasn't being used to call persons, it was usually blaring recordings of popular songs or transcriptions of radio broadcasts made in the United States.

As dusk deepened into night I began to get a squeamish, queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach. After all my efforts to go on the Tokyo raid, I began to get apprehensive and fearful. Don't let anybody tell you that he felt no fear of some sort when in combat. It isn't the mark of a coward, it's the mark of a human. I was feeling mine. I went up to the headquarters quonset and pleaded with the first-sergeant.

"Sarge, keep that music going. It keeps my mind off the mission tomorrow."

I went back to the quonset hut I lived in and lay down listening to the raucous-sounding music.

Strangely, I called to my mind my limitations and human failings—how, though I guessed I was a good worker, I was inclined to become too forceful at times, to push too hard toward getting things done. It was at once a weakness and a strength. That very fault caused me trouble in some directions, but it gave me many advantages in others. Basically, it was the impelling force that led me to want desperately to fly this mission tomorrow, I reasoned. Basically, it was the force which was gradually building up in me an intense dislike for my squadron commander. I felt, I thought, always an admiration for real ability with a modicum of humility. I disliked self-righteousness, officiousness, pompousness, self-importance, pettiness, bigotry.

I realized, too, that I was far from subtle oftentimes, that tactfulness was frequently not one of my virtues. It sometimes put me behind the eight-ball, but I felt that it almost as often stood me in good stead. I was forthright and not evasive, straightforward and not skittering, and people seemed to like a forthright and straightforward person, at least as long as he didn't clash with them or their views. When I did clash, then I found myself in hot water. But this, I reasoned, was to be expected, as inevitable as the dawning of tomorrow's day, as certain as death and taxes.

Briefly, there flitted through my mind the week end I had spent in Kansas City on my way to our staging base from my last visit to my wife in Alabama—the whiskey consumed by the bottle in hotel rooms and by the drink in bars; the girls that were ogled and the risqué and ribald remarks that passed among us about them. If all the girls that were mentally undressed and tucked in bed with someone in the crowd as his bedmate that night were laid end to end, they would have reached from Kansas City to San Francisco. And, strange as it may seem, none of it was meant seriously. It was all hot-breath talk and masculine

boasting of men about to leave the United States and the myriad of taken-for-granted things it represented. Some of them would never return alive and, as we stood there talking, we realized it vaguely, although no thought was apparent and no word of it was spoken.

There was Ray Crook whom some little trollop had inveigled into marriage just before he went overseas to North Africa a year or so back. Someone had written him that she was sleeping with every man that would crawl in bed with her, at the same time graciously accepting the handsome allotment check which Ray had unstintingly arranged for her when he left the States.

Ray had to put the ghastly thought from his mind as he went hunting German submarines in a B-24. But when he got back to the States he secured an expensive divorce. Ray stood at the bar. He was quieter than the rest of us, more ingratiating in his talk and his manners, I thought.

I did not know it then, but Crook would not live to return to the States.

I had a normal apprehension of this completely new and unknown quantity that I was facing tomorrow. I had often heard tales of what combat in the air was like. Some were told boastfully, loudly, and others were related quietly, almost apologetically. I had heard repeated many times the popular song of the day, "Comin' In on a Wing and a Prayer." And I knew, with a knowledge born of actual experience, that the song was nothing more than glamorization of the risks taken by the air force. I knew instinctively that the song was an utter impossibility, taken literally. We had no flying wings—they were not beyond the drawing-board stage—and with a conventional-type aircraft of the kind we flew you needed, in reality, considerably more than a wing to stay in the air. I always felt that prayer was exceedingly helpful and certainly it gave me solace, if nothing else, but I took the realistic viewpoint that God could only do so much!

I dwelled only for a split second on the thought that I might not get back. Instinctively, I realized that the other thoughts I

was having were the normal pre-combat ones, but thoughts about death were the kind that made one refuse to fly in combat. That I didn't want to do.

I tried to analyze in a different way why I wanted to fly the mission tomorrow when I didn't have to. I supposed, first of all, it was because I wanted to be able to say, "I flew on the first B-29 mission to Tokyo on November 24, 1944." This should sound good as I dawdled my grandchildren fondly on my knee in my dotage.

But that was only part of the reason. I wanted my family to be proud of me. I didn't want them knowing—and I didn't want to have to live with myself knowing—that I had arrived in a combat area and just sat around at a desk. Frankly, also, I liked the looks of flashy, colorful ribbons on the breast of my tunic. I knew that the only way to get them was to fly missions. Further than that, I realized that the only way I could get back to the States and all it represented, at least inside of two or three years, was to fly the prescribed number of missions for a tour; then I felt that I would be rotated back to the States upon the recommendation of the flight surgeon just like everybody else. At that time I had a horror of spending two or three years on Saipan.

All those thoughts and more raced through my mind madly. My head throbbed achingly and my ears buzzed with a noise akin to that of a thousand bumblebees. I closed my eyes tightly to shut out thought, but this only brought brilliant spots and streaks before my eyes.

I tossed and rolled, but I suspect that the others in my quonset who were going on the mission tomorrow were doing the same thing, because I heard the creaking of many canvas cots. . . .

# 8

## TARGET TOKYO!

My uneasy sleep came abruptly to a close when the operations sergeant grabbed me roughly by the shoulder and shook hard.

"Get up, Captain," he rasped, "it's 4:30."

As little sleep as I had, I came quickly awake and swung my legs over the side of the bed to start dressing.

What seemed like a long time ago in the States we had been briefed on what to expect in the event we were shot down over Japan and chanced to live. The picture was extremely dismal. . . .

"If you belong on a B-29 crew," the officer briefing us had said, "you can expect the roughest sort of treatment. What little information we have indicates that if you are below the rank of lieutenant-colonel you will be required to labor, and the few reports we have show that if you are an officer you will be treated worse than an enlisted man. You will be interrogated more often and more rigorously because the Japs think you know more, and if you don't come across with the information they want you'll stand a good chance of being given the 'business' until you break, one way or another. By international law you are required to give only your name, rank and serial number, but the Nips are not respecting international law on that score. They are anxious to find out everything they can about a B-29 and they will go to any length to do so. You are to tell them as little as possible, but don't try to lie to them or mislead them. They're too smart for that and they'll only make it worse for you."

I determined that I would wear no insignia of rank and carry

nothing to indicate that I was an officer. I pulled on my flying suit over my underwear and stuck my identification card in the right knee pocket. In the event I should die or be so seriously injured I couldn't speak, I wanted some means of identification, but if I had to *bail out* over Japan I was going to throw my identification card away while I was floating down.

I wore no clothing other than underwear, flying suit, shoes and socks. I took along my flak helmet, flak vest, shoulder holster with a .45 automatic pistol, web-waist belt with a first-aid packet, canteen of water, two extra clips of ammunition and a knife in a scabbard, my Mae West life vest and a leather helmet with earphones and an oxygen mask. At the plane I would pick up my parachute which had a one-man liferaft attached.

The sleep had not rested me and, although I was emotionally tense, I was physically tired. I trudged up to the tent but breakfast didn't interest me.

The mess sergeant issued me a brown paper sack which contained a cheese sandwich, a baloney sandwich and an orange—the usual flight lunch fare. I dragged on over to the operations quonset to find my crew and get a ride up to the flight line. All was organized confusion. The main problem was to get the planes off the ground on schedule and all else revolved around that. I milled around in the crowd with part of my equipment on and part carried—it was heavy. I could find no one from my crew.

"Wanna go up to the flight line, Captain?" one of the drivers of the weapons carriers hauling the crews asked.

"Sure."

"Well, get in and I'll take you up."

I crawled in the front seat beside him, the back of the vehicle filled up and we trundled off.

It was then that I felt I would never make my first mission.

The route took us up a steep road cut in the side of an abrupt hill. The road had been hurriedly cut out by engineers; deep Saipan mud and constant travel made it unusually dangerous. Traffic was heavy going both ways and the night had scarcely

given way to light. The vehicle rutted so deeply into the mud on its right wheels that it seemed impossible for it to stay upright. I was on the right side; I could visualize being crushed to death in the mud by the overturning of a weapons carrier. It was no way for an airman on his way to combat to die. I crawled around in back of the driver and stood on the left running board. Jeers and catcalls came from the men in the back, but I cared not. We churned slowly up the hill, luckily. Relieved, I scurried back into my seat on the right of the driver.

I found my crew and scrambled up the ladder into the Super-fort.

While we waited on the taxi-strip in a long line of B-29s, I checked up on the details of the mission.

We were to take off, assemble in a loose flight with two other planes just north of Saipan and stay at around a thousand feet, in order to conserve gasoline, until we were some six hundred or seven hundred miles toward Tokyo. Then we would begin a gradual climb to bombing altitude, twenty-nine thousand feet. We would reach that altitude just a short time before we sighted the coast of Japan. The entire flight plan hinged on gasoline consumption. We were pushing the B-29 to its maximum range with the bomb load, armament and armor we had. We had five-hundred-pound-G.P. (general purpose) bombs. There were four .50-calibre machine guns in the upper forward turret, two in the lower forward turret, two each in the rear upper and lower turrets, and two, as well as a 20-mm. gun, in the tail. Because of the extra gas tanks and bombs in the bomb bays we carried flak armor in the bomb bays. There was some armor on other vital parts of the plane but I wasn't sure just where it was.

"I'd feel a lot better if I thought we had something besides just water between this speck of an island and Japan," I ventured. "If we just had some little island or some place where we could land if we got shot up and couldn't get back, it would help a helluva lot."

There was no answer; everyone seemed to be busy or pre-occupied.

I sat there watching the Superforts as they rolled down the long runway, gathered speed and swooped out of sight behind a small rise at the end of the runway only to reappear out over the water. Off in the distance to the right the first few were beginning to form up in formation and head toward Japan.

We trundled slowly up to the near end of the runway and took our place behind another Superfort. We were getting off at one-minute intervals.

The pilot pressed the mike button and called the Saipan tower. "This is 46939 in position for take-off, over."

Back over the interphone came, "46939, you are cleared for take-off. Good luck, over."

"Roger, over and out."

The engines revved up and the Superfort strained forward, seeming to bunch itself for the lurch off the ground with the heavy load.

The co-pilot called off the airspeed. "90—100—110—120—140—160. . . ."

"All right, bring the wheels and flaps up," the pilot shouted hoarsely, as he wrestled with the controls.

We roared out over the bay, turned off to the right and began to gain a little altitude. We circled, waiting for the two other planes that would be in our flight to join us. Craning our necks, we could see other Superforts back on the island lumbering down the runway and soaring off. The planes joined our formation and we straightened out toward Japan.

We were lead plane in a three-plane element, so it was the navigator's job to keep us on course and at the correct altitude. The navigators in the planes on our wings had no responsibility for getting us there. They simply kept track of where we had been.

We settled down to the monotonous part of the flight. Below us nothing but water, above, the sky, and to the right and left, Superforts.

If our flight plan was not too far off, we would reach the coast of Japan in about seven and a half hours. In the meantime,

our worries were relatively slight. I crawled back into the tunnel to see if I could catch up on some sleep, cautioning the navigator to give me a call if he got in trouble or needed any help.

I couldn't sleep. Even relaxing was difficult. I had always believed I had flown enough to sleep on a wing, if necessary. Somehow, this seemed different from mere flying. This was it—the real McCoy, the prize at the end of the rainbow, the ultimate, combat! And yet I feared it somehow. I was tense, I had a dull headache, my eyes burned. I was apprehensive, yet I wouldn't have missed it for all the gold at Fort Knox. . . .

Time crept by. I heard the engines change tempo from a gentle, steady hum to a full-throated roar. I climbed out of the tunnel.

"What's up, Jerry?" I asked the navigator.

"We're beginning our first climb, Captain. Going up to eight thousand feet this time."

"Are we on course?"

"So far as I can tell. Can you tell anything about where we are on that ocean? It all looks like water to me—no Kansas City or Los Angeles to set you straight. I've been doing d.r., sometimes using my metro wind (wind data furnished by weather section), and sometimes getting drift from the white caps. It's been pretty rough down this low, though. I shot a couple of sunlines a little while back but the sun was too far off to one side to get an accurate ground speed."

"O.K., my friend, just as long as you know where we are and we're approximating the flight plan, I'm happy."

I pulled out my brown paper sack of food—it had been about six hours since breakfast, and I had had no breakfast. The food in it almost defied eating. The bread was hard and crumbly, the cheese hard and rancid and the baloney greasy and covered with sticky mayonnaise. The orange was probably good, but I wasn't fond of oranges. Nonetheless, I ate part of the baloney sandwich, peeled the orange and ate it. One thing for certain, if I died I was going to die on an empty stomach, and if the Japs got me they would get a mighty hungry American.

After our climb, we leveled off at eight thousand feet. This, apparently, was just an altitude arrived at because it was high enough so that surface craft—we were getting close to Japanese-held Iwo Jima—wouldn't catch us like sitting ducks, and low enough so that we didn't have to pressurize the plane and too much gasoline wasn't required.

The navigator kept poring over his maps, brandishing his plotter, computer, dividers and sextant from time to time. The closer the navigator gets to his destination, the harder he works and the more he worries.

The crew had lost some of its tenseness, and even I felt somewhat more relaxed. After all, this was just like any other flying, even though it was all over water, I told myself convincingly.

It was interesting to look out to the right and left and see the number of other formations of Superforts. We even called the tail gunner to ask if he saw any behind us.

"Yeah, about four or five. We must be on course."

Either we were on course or a lot of other navigators were making the same mistake our navigator was, whatever it might be.

The ocean below grew more turbulent and we flew over a number of clouds and through some small ones. This indicated that we might run into bad weather ahead.

The navigator's voice broke the interphone silence. "Pilot from Navigator, begin your climb to twenty-nine thousand feet at 1136, that's in about two minutes. I'll shoot the flare at the minute and at the beginning of the climb, over."

"Navigator from Pilot, roger."

I went back to sit beside the navigator and follow his work rather carefully. From here on out a navigational mistake might cause us serious trouble.

The flight engineer was a little mite, not five feet tall, and he sat at his huge instrument panel like a grade-school boy at a blackboard. The radio operator, just around on the other side of the four-gun turret, was busy fiddling with the radio in one

way or another. I was completely unfamiliar with what he was doing.

At eighteen thousand feet we hit scattered clouds which grew thicker as we surged upward and onward. The turbulence in going through them tossed us around so that I had to grab whatever was nearest me.

Climbing twenty-one thousand feet at a relatively low rate of climb—in the neighborhood of two hundred feet a minute—takes quite a while. In fact, the plan called for us to reach altitude only ten or fifteen minutes before we reached the coast of Japan. This necessitated our getting ourselves in readiness for the bomb run over the target during the climb. I stepped back around the four-gun turret and began to get on my Mae West, shoulder holster and pistol, belt with canteen of water, first-aid packet, extra clips of ammunition and a knife in a scabbard, leather helmet and oxygen mask, flak vest and flak helmet. I could hardly move.

"Say, can you pick up any Japanese stations?" I asked the radio operator.

He gestured, pointing toward his earphones on his ears and indicated that he couldn't hear. I shouted louder, "Can you pick up any Jap stations?"

He put his fingers to his earphones, as though listening more carefully, and nodded slowly, thoughtfully. "I think I can. They gave us the frequencies of a Jap commercial station in Tokyo and one in Nagoya. I'll try to get them as soon as I get done monitoring this frequency. They told us at briefing to monitor this frequency and another."

I waited a moment and he began to turn the crank which operated the dial on the radio, listening. Finally, the cranking came to a halt. He rocked the crank back and forth a few times. Then he took off the earphones and handed them to me. "There's a Tokyo commercial station. Doesn't sound very interesting to me."

I slipped the earphones over my head and listened intently. There was a sing-song noise, as though many mandolins were

being plucked or sawed and a weird-sounding horn was being tootled. The music continued for several minutes without a break for a commercial. This was not America! I listened for a few minutes and turned the earphones back to the radioman.

"You can have it back. I can't make anything out of it either."

I struggled to my feet and attempted to wiggle through the passageway between the turret and the navigator's desk. As I leaned over, my flak vest caught on the edge of the desk and my web belt caught on a hook on the turret. My helmet fell noisily off on the navigator's desk.

"Here, Captain, you're gonna get murdered before we ever hit flak and fighters if you're not careful," he said, laughing.

He loosened my flak vest from the desk and clapped my helmet back on my head. I unhooked the belt from the turret and squeezed on through. I had yet to slip into my parachute. I suppose I must have looked, and certainly felt, like a man from Mars. I was so weighted down that, if the plane were badly disabled, I felt I would have trouble moving quickly enough to bail out. It was an anomaly I was never able to figure out.

I moved forward to a spot between the pilot and co-pilot and pulled on my parachute. The bombardier farther ahead in the nose was trying to get settled after getting into his equipment. We were getting up into more rarefied air and the engines were straining harder than before. Down below were heavy patches of thick clouds which very largely obscured all view of the ocean. Up ahead the clouds seemed to be even heavier, indicating that all view of the ocean below would be blotted out. The metal floor of the plane was cold, extremely cold to the touch.

The navigator was working feverishly now, attempting to make certain that we would hit the coast of Japan near the point we were briefed on. The bombardier had a coastal map of Japan, searching ahead to see if he could find the coast and determine where we were. Seventeen hundred miles over water was a long distance without any definite check point to determine if you were on course. We were sweating it out.

The flight plan called for each flight to go in individually and

drop the bombs. We would head almost straight for Mount Fujiyama, then turn right at the I.P. (initial point) and drop on the Mushashina Aircraft Factory on the outskirts of Tokyo, going on east across Tokyo and out to the ocean, and from there, if we were lucky, Saipan-ward.

Breaking the tense emotional stillness that permeated the plane, the bombardier called, "There's Japan right up ahead through that break in the clouds."

I craned my neck looking, and saw, fleetingly, the dim outline of a shore; then a cloud closed in. There was not much doubt that we would have to orient ourselves on the coast of Japan almost entirely by radar and drop our bombs by radar. I struggled back to the navigator just as we leveled off at twenty-nine thousand feet.

"Jerry, I'm almost certain this will all be radar. How's your radar man?"

"He's O.K. Let me get him on interphone and turn my scope on."

I leaned over the desk to look at the navigator's radar scope which was positioned above the instrument panel. He turned it on and adjusted the brilliance, at the same time calling over the interphone, "Mickey (code name for radar) from Navigator. I'd like to pick up the coast which is ahead twenty or thirty miles. We've got practically complete undercast. We'll probably have to drop by mickey, too, so you can plan on that."

"Roger, watch the scope and I'll try to get the coast as clear as possible."

Since we had leveled off, radar should have given us an accurate indication of the coastline. We were at a little over five and a half miles above the earth, but the only indication of our altitude was the straining of the engines in the rarefied atmosphere and the extreme coldness of the metal of the plane. The cabin was pressurized so that we were at eight thousand feet inside. The outside temperature was about fifty degrees below zero. If our plane should suddenly depressurize, we could live only about twenty or thirty seconds without additional oxygen.

The scope brought in the outline of the coast fairly well, but it faded badly at times and at other times went out completely. The bombardier was scanning ahead carefully, consulting his coastal map, but the almost complete cloud cover hindered him a great deal. It was obvious we were going to have a difficult time pinpointing ourselves on the coast of Japan.

As we pulled nearer, the cloud cover became complete and all view below was blotted out. The bombardier lay down his map and shrugged his shoulders. "From here on out, it's up to radar."

The navigator and I watched the radar scope and the maps closely. We finally got what we thought was a point on the scope that we could identify on the map. I will never know whether or not we were right. That is one thing about navigation in an airplane; unless you are completely familiar with the terrain over which you are flying, you can seldom be positive you are where you have every reason to believe you are.

If we were where we thought we were, we were about on course.

"Captain, I'm going to proceed as though we were O.K. That's the best information I have."

We were over Japan, but we had seen no fighters, no flak, and below us were thick, gray-white fleecy clouds. We roared on toward Mount Fujiyama whose majestic white peak poked boldly through the cloud layer below. It was an infallible landmark; the only trouble was that you couldn't be completely certain of the exact direction from which you were approaching it.

As we turned at the I.P. just short of Fujiyama and headed on a course that would bring us over Tokyo, the navigator called to radar, "Mickey, from Navigator. This is the bomb run, will you give me best possible reception and a bomb-release line, over?"

"Roger, the set is fading badly, but I will try to keep it tuned, over."

Tokyo showed up as a heavier blurb on the scope than the surrounding territory. The Mushashina plant was on the edge of the city. It did not show up. Radar bombing was an area proposi-

tion, rather than a pinpoint one, and the best we could hope to do would be to drop our bombs in the vicinity of the edge of Tokyo. We saw no fighters and encountered no flak; it was uncanny and eerie. I expected at any moment to see a horde of Nip fighters hurtle through the clouds below and ascend on our three poorly protected Superforts, or to see large puffs of curling black flak burst around us.

"Bombardier from Navigator, open the bomb-bay doors, over."

"Roger, bomb-bay doors coming open."

The coldness of the metal parts of the plane began to permeate throughout the entire plane. I looked outside at the four churning engines and wondered how they withstood the extreme cold. I glanced beyond them to our wing planes. They were in close to us, for mutual protection, although they bobbed back and forth like circus horses prancing nervously. I knew that the loss of one engine on any plane would cause it to fall behind and descend; this would leave it at the utter mercy of the Japs. It took all four engines churning hard to carry the load we were carrying at twenty-nine thousand feet. No one said anything, we just kept scanning the skies and wishing the bombs were dropped and we were on our way home.

"Bombardier from Navigator, get ready to drop."

"Roger."

"1-2-3-drop."

The bombardier pushed the toggle button. "Bombs away!"

I looked out toward the wing ships to watch their bombs fall. They were dropping on us, and when they saw ours begin to come out of our bomb bays, they would drop theirs. Their bomb bays hung open but no bombs tumbled out.

"Jerry," I shouted aft, "have the radio man see if our bombs hung up. They didn't come out of our wing ships."

I saw the navigator lean back and shout around the turret. In a moment, he leaned forward and shouted, "Hell, no. They're still in the bomb bays. Damn it to hell, whats'a matter? I don't wanna waste this trip."

We were directly over Tokyo. The bombardier pushed the

toggle button again. We waited—no bombs out of the wing ships; the radio man looked—our bombs were still in the bays.

"Hit the salvo lever," I offered. "They'll still do plenty of damage if we get them out now."

The bombardier pushed the salvo lever forward, we waited, watched, no bombs came out of the wing planes' bomb bays. The radio man looked—our bombs were still in the bays.

"Hit it again," I shouted frantically. The bombardier did so.

We waited, watched, no bombs came out of the wing planes' bomb bays. The radio man looked. Our bombs were still in the bays.

The air was blue with cuss words! Each one of us unlimbered our biggest and best intonations to and about deity, parentage and habits. It was the most lucid exhibition of cussing I had ever heard.

The pilot finally tapered off enough to blurt, "I think the bomb-releasing mechanism is mechanical and it froze up at this high altitude."

We were beyond Tokyo now according to the radar scope, out over the ocean. The navigator gave the heading home.

"Pilot from Navigator, turn to 171 degrees, over."

"Navigator from Pilot, roger."

We turned slowly and our wing planes did likewise. The crew was burning at not having dropped the bombs. It would take us some time to get over it. We flew about eight hours to get there and were faced with a six- or seven-hour journey back; we laid our lives on the line, and all in vain. We were boiling!

We began our journey back to Saipan with our bombs still in the bomb bays.

# 9

## WHEW!

Unbelievably we flew away from Tokyo. I still was unable to understand that we had been over Japan for half an hour without seeing a Nip fighter or any flak.

True, we probably hadn't done too much damage, but it would have been a great morale boost to the Japs and a terrific blow to the Allies had a good many Superforts been destroyed. It was uncanny.

We were flying at twenty-nine thousand feet. The three-plane formation held tightly together, fearful that if we descended or broke up we would be jumped by Jap fighters or subjected to flak.

Everyone was jabbering over the interphone.

"Man, that wasn't so bad. Not a fighter, no flak."

"Yeah, but I'll bet you were worried. I was sweating just the same. Don't give me that 'hero' stuff, I read the magazines, too."

"Lieutenant (this to the pilot), you mean that those bombs hung up and are still in the bays? Christ, how will I ever explain that to my gall!"

"What the hell we gonna do when we get back to base? I don't wanna land with those GP's in the plane."

"Don't worry, don't worry," the pilot said, "when we get down a little lower we'll dump 'em. I think they're frozen in the racks at this altitude."

"Damn it, Lieutenant, this is a lot of flyin' for nothin'. Hell, it's just a dry run, that's what is it, a fifteen-hour dry run. What a helluva way to fight a war."

Over the earphones the pilot replied, "I know, I know. Now listen, men, relax. There's nothing we can do about it now. If we stayed over Tokyo all day, we'd never been rid of those bombs. It's this damn mechanical releasing device in this plane. It froze at that high altitude. It was too damn cold. That's what I think and, by God, we'll get it fixed before we come back up here again. Now let's concentrate on gettin' home safely so we can live to fly another mission. We're a helluva long way from home, ya know."

"Yeah," in a subdued voice.

"O.K., Lieutenant, you win."

"You're right, Lieutenant."

One by one over the interphone the crew checked in and settled back to begin the journey home.

Gradually, we started descending, feeling that we were out of close fighter range if we didn't go down too fast. More than that, we were burning precious gasoline at a fast clip at such an altitude. If we got lower we would use substantially less. It was imperative that we get down as quickly as possible, commensurate with reasonable safety.

The wing planes began to move out away from us, probably with a view toward staying well within sight, but moving far enough away to safely go on automatic pilot.

I was able to relax and went soundly to sleep in the tunnel, my feet dangling over the door that opened into the bomb bays. . . .

When I awoke, the light on the navigator's desk threw a feeble spot on the map.

Rubbing the sleep out of my eyes, I asked, "Where are we, Jerry?"

"Right along in here," he said, pointing west and south of Iwo Jima. "The last position report I made showed us about abreast of Iwo. We're making a pretty good ground speed, y'know; descending all the way."

I moved across to the flight engineer.

"How's the gas holding up?"

"It's gonna be close, mighty close. I've got the engines leaned down as far as they'll go. We can't afford to get off course, or we will never make it."

Now, there was a happy thought! By the grace of God, we had come through thus far without mishap, only to have the engineer tell us we stood a good chance of landing in the ocean.

A little edgy, I replied, "What the hell do you mean, we won't make it if we get off course? The navigator's no magician and this is all water. We're coming back at the wrong time to shoot any stars. You must be nuts. We could easily get a little off course."

I received only an icy stare of paternalism for my speech. I moved forward to soothe my hurt feelings and looked out ahead of the plane. It was well into dusk, the loneliest time of the day. I could no longer see our wing planes on either side.

The pilot punched me and said, "Snyder, look off to our left. What does that look like to you?"

What appeared to be shooting lights of some kind showed up some distance off our left wing.

"I dunno, looks like it might be a plane in distress shooting a Very signal."

We called the whole crew and asked them to look and see what they thought it was. We talked it back and forth over the interphone and finally agreed that it could be one of our planes down, or going down, and shooting distress signals. The only other possibility was that it was one of the northernmost, normally inactive, volcanic islands of the Marianas chain. The navigator exploded that theory by telling us we weren't that far south.

"Engineer from Pilot. Do we have enough gas to go over and see what those lights are, over?"

"Pilot from Engineer. I don't believe so. I don't want to be responsible if we do and don't make it home. We're on the ragged edge now, over."

The pilot called, "Radio from Pilot, call Buttercup and report

those lights, that it may be a plane in trouble. You can get its position from the navigator, over."

He turned to me. "I hate like hell to pass it up, but we could lose another B-29 and fourteen men as well. If it is a Superfort, they can send someone out from Saipan to pick 'em up almost as quickly as we could get over there. They would be equipped to take care of 'em and we aren't."

I felt better.

As we approached the point where the navigator said Saipan should be, everyone scanned ahead anxiously. The cheerful flight engineer kept saying at intervals, "We'll never make it if we don't get in soon. We're practically out of gas now. We have about five minutes' flying left."

He first made those remarks when we were abreast of the northernmost island in the Marianas chain. We were still flying forty-five minutes later, so he was obviously wrong about "five minutes' flying left." The trouble was, I didn't know how wrong! At any time he could be right for a change, and then we would have no alternative but to crash-land in the ocean. With swells running high, it was a rough proposition.

Once again we began to sweat. As it began to run off my face in rivulets, we glimpsed lights ahead which we fervently hoped were Saipan. We turned slightly to the left and flew directly toward them, trying to conserve the "five-minutes" supply of gasoline.

As we drew near, the sky was full of B-29s coming in to land. I suppose all of them must have felt they were low on gasoline because they were all hugging the island and trying to crowd into the landing traffic pattern ahead of the others.

The pilot was an old hand at the cutthroat game of *landing, landing, who's landing first?* for he pushed the Superfort over on its side, brushed between two others, straightened up and began calling the Saipan tower, "Buttercup from Army 46939, over."

"Army 46939, this is Buttercup, go ahead, over."

"Buttercup, 46939, request landing instructions, we are low on gasoline, over."

"Roger, 46939, make a straight-in approach to the landing strip. Winds are from northwest at twenty-three (miles per hour) with gusts to thirty-nine (miles per hour). Call me when you are on final approach and wheels are down, over."

"Roger."

We turned left on to the base leg of the landing traffic pattern and the co-pilot's weary voice called out, "Wheels and flaps coming down."

The pilot pushed one earphone more closely to his ear and listened intently, then he said in a tired, disgusted voice, "Roger, Buttercup, I'll go around."

The engineer started yelling at the top of his lungs, "We'll never make it. Every tank shows dry. We're flying now on what mixture is in the engines. Sure as hell we're gonna end up in the drink."

"Can't help it," the pilot argued, "a twenty-nine came in with a man who was dying. They wanted to get in, thought maybe they could save him. The tower let 'em cut in ahead of us."

I felt that this situation deserved a little personal attention, although I didn't know what I could do to help.

"Lemme see those gas gauges," I growled to the engineer.

He gave me a disgusted look and flipped the gauge switch from one to the other of the tanks. The all registered worse than empty—they were pushing the stop on the empty side.

I scurried back between the pilot and the co-pilot.

"Damn it, Ed, those things are worse than empty. Better bank easy on the turns or we'll go into the ocean sure as hell."

He said nothing. We flew on around the island, cutting the landing pattern dangerously close. The pilot was listening in on the interphone conversations other Superforts were having with the Saipan control tower. He turned to the co-pilot.

"By God, I'm goin' in. Every plane reporting in claims he doesn't have enough gas to go around. It's gonna be a helluva mess."

We flipped over quickly and headed straight for the runway in what amounted to a screaming dive. One engine sputtered

dangerously, but we had sufficient flying speed so that it didn't matter. We were close on the tail of a Superfort ahead of us. If he did anything unusual, we were in trouble.

We raced in over the end of the runway and the pilot began to ease her down skillfully. We mushed on and on, trying desperately to dissipate some of the excess flying speed we had picked up in the near-dive approach. I feared we were going on off the end of the runway. It was pitch black except for the few lights edging the runway and our landing lights. Our wheels finally touched the ground. The pilot braked the plane hard, and I breathed a deep sigh of relief.

We rolled to a cross taxi strip, pulled off the main runway and two engines went dead! On the remaining two engines we found a hardstand on which to park the plane and closed out the first B-29 mission on Tokyo.

I would have given plenty for a few gallons more of precious gasoline!

# 10

## A COOK'S TOUR

I had been on Saipan more than a week and had not yet ventured beyond the gray, shoetop-deep mud in my squadron area. In fact, I had scarcely had time. We had been briefed for missions, prepared for them, then rebriefed, reprepared, finally flown two in the first few days and tried to get our living quarters in some semblance of order.

Much had been told us about Saipan before we had arrived, as well as afterward. I was ready to see what part of it was true, if any. My duties at operations—I was still squadron navigator—left me a few minutes of spare time one morning. I went outside to the operations jeep and asked its driver, “Are you acquainted with the island? I wanna see what it looks like.”

“Yes, sir, I should be. I been over here about three months now.” He had come over with the ground echelon. “I took the squadron operations officer on a tour around the island day before yesterday.”

“Well, charge up the horses then. I want a well-conducted tour of Saipan,” I said, grinning.

We left hurriedly in a cloud of mud.

Saipan is an island eighteen miles long and five and a half miles wide at the widest point. It had been a gruesomely bloody battleground; the Nips had defended it to the last man. It had been torn up badly by heavy aerial bombing, naval shells and marine artillery.

Prior to its capture, it had had a small seaport, Garapan, and a mill of some sort, Charan-Kanoa. The latter had been con-

verted to the manufacture of war equipment and was so being used at the time the battle of Saipan began. The island was heavily infested with flies when it was captured, but almost weekly aerial sprayings of DDT by an air-force C-47 had obliterated them.

We headed for Camp Susupe, internment camp for all enemy nationals. Those civilians captured—Chamorros, Koreans, Japanese and mixtures—were classed as enemy nationals, placed in a compound under guard and allowed out only in the daytime to toil in the fields.

"We got one of our non-coms down at Susupe on guard duty. He can get you all the Jap souvenirs you want," the driver told me.

"What do they sell 'em for, money or whiskey?"

"Either one. If the Chamorros do any of their handicraft for you, you can pay 'em off in cigarettes, even. They make a nice bracelet for your wife, handmade and hand figured, out of metal from captured Jap planes. Only be sure you know what metal you're getting. There have been enough bracelets made out of metal from captured Jap planes to require half the Jap Air Force to have cracked up on Saipan. It's a racket."

Camp Susupe was a large land area situated around a small body of water, Lake Susupe, and enclosed by high barbed-wire fence. Most of the buildings were makeshift; the few that were not housed the headquarters of the army unit charged with caring for the internees. The Saipan residents had a unique habit of bathing at a communal bath. All sexes and all ages bathed together openly. This aroused enormous curiosity among the United States troops. At bathing times the roads around Susupe were clogged with traffic, vehicular and foot. The men gaped open-mouthed at a show which far exceeded that put on by Lady Godiva on her famous ride, or by the other ancient who bathed daily in asses' milk.

The jeep driver hunted our squadron non-com who was on duty at the camp.

"What do you have in the way of souvenirs, and how much do you want for them?" I asked, grinning.

"Captain, we've got the finest souvenir yet right here," he began his sales talk. "It's a genuine Japanese compass taken from a captured Jap plane." He held it up proudly. "Ain't it a beaut? I'll let you have it for only fifteen dollars. It's a steal."

I took it and looked it over carefully. I could see no difference between it and a liquid compass mounted in an American training plane; it bore a Japanese nameplate, otherwise it was outwardly the same. I couldn't see fifteen dollars' worth of souvenir value in it.

"What else do you have?" I asked, handing it back to him.

"Well, we have some Jap money. Sell any of it to you for a dollar."

I bought a couple of bills.

"How about getting some of those bracelets made out of metal from a captured Jap plane," I continued.

"Say, Captain, I can do it. I'll get that gook (Saipan native) started on it tomorrow. He doesn't have many tools to work with and he's kinda slow. About all he has is a file. He makes some mighty pretty tropical designs, though. Your wife will like 'em. Does it for a dollar and a half a bracelet. How many do you want, Captain?"

"Give me two."

"Yes, sir, Captain, be glad to. Shall I give them to the driver here when they're finished, then he can pay me?"

"That'll be fine with me, Corporal." I was glorying a little in the rank-happy way he was addressing me. Usually it wasn't that way in combat. He was a souvenir salesman supreme.

We proceeded on down to the mill at Charan-Kanoa. It was almost completely demolished; just a portion of each of the four outside walls was intact. The wrecked machinery was still standing there.

"The marines told me that building was full of Jap observers during the early part of the battle. Bombs and heavy naval shelling wiped it out. It was supposed to be a sugar mill, or

something, but when it was captured they found airplane parts being made there," the driver explained.

We passed on down the road which ran along the beach. Every few yards there were wrecked American tanks. They had never been moved from the place where they were hit when they started their assault.

The driver looked out of the corner of his eye at them and then at me. "A lot of lives lost here, Captain. A lot of 'em. Those marines had a hard time taking this island just so you men could bomb Japan."

I looked sharply at him, wondering what he had in mind, then answered thoughtfully, "Yeah, I know it. We got a pretty big responsibility. I'll try to do my share."

It was understandable why the marines had suffered so many casualties. The island was thick tropical underbrush which required practically step-by-step hacking to clear a path. The hills we passed had rocky niches and caves in their sides—perfect hiding places for Jap snipers. Almost the entire southwestern part of the island was surveyed by lofty Mount Topatchau; the Japs could, and did, sit safely near its summit and pick off the advancing marines by rifle fire and rain heavy devastating artillery shells down on them.

Farther down the beach, the navy had chosen to erect its main dock facilities. It was surrounded by a large cluster of quonset huts of all sizes. These housed the administrative offices and the repair shops for the navy port. The little town of Garapan—the only settlement of any consequence prior to conquest—was almost completely wiped out. Its buildings had contained Jap snipers and observers. Each one had to be obliterated. There were only bare portions of walls left standing. It had been the seaport for the island, but it had been so badly wrecked that the navy had passed it up and established its own port in a different place. It would have been more trouble to clear the debris than to start from scratch.

Up on the north end of the island, there was a landing strip used by air force P-47 fighter planes. Strewn around at various

points were service troop installations—quartermaster, engineer, ordnance and the like. The troops on Saipan had to be self-sustaining, so there was a laundry, clothing maintenance and repair platoon, a bakery, a food-supply unit, large freezer lockers, the island post-exchange stockpile and numerous other similar installations. Coming back from the north to the northeastern part of the island, one began to run into the B-29 groups and 73rd Wing Headquarters.

The rocky, heavy-foliaged slopes and caves of Mount Topat-chau still contained many die-hard, holdout Japanese. Occasionally one would come out or be flushed out.

One day toward noon near the north end of the B-29 runway, a man came running across the runway with other men chasing him and shooting at him. Suddenly there was an explosion and the man being chased fell to the ground. A crowd gathered. I hopped into a jeep and drove up there.

"What happened?" I asked, as I shouldered my way through the tightly pressed crowd. When I got to the center, one of the men with a smoking forty-five in his hand replied, "One of those damned hari-kari Japs again. We saw him sneak out of some underbrush along the edge of the runway. When we yelled at him to halt, he started running. We ran after him, shooting; I think one of us clipped him in the leg and he got scared. He took out a hand grenade, pulled the pin and held it under his chin. See what it did."

I looked. The center portion of his face had been blown away. He was gruesome-looking mess. I noticed he was wearing a pair of marine combat boots and khaki trousers held up by rope.

He had been hiding out in the hills, but for some reason had come down to the B-29 landing strip. That was his downfall.

An M.P. drove up. When the crowd had disappeared, I asked him, "This is a helluva mess. Does it happen often?"

"Oftener than you think. These Nips are funny people. Pecul-

iar thing happened the other week. When we counted one group of Japs who had worked in a field near the base of Topatchau, we had three more in the evening than we had in the morning. After we got back to the compound we started checking names—the names they gave us. They're such damn liars I don't believe they're their right names, but they're the ones we use. We found three men not on the roster. We took them into the intelligence quonset and questioned them.

"We've suspected for a long time that there was army personnel leading that group up on Topatchau. It was run too smart not to be. These Japs told us it was Captain Matsida, a former officer in the Japanese garrison here. He's got three or four army sergeants and a lot of civilian men and women with him. They were getting along pretty well, killing stray marines and soldiers for clothing and stealing food from kitchens at night. Matsida put guards out in a ring around the camp in the daytime to turn back any of his outfit that might have ideas about turning themselves in to us Americans. However, he and the sergeants commenced to keep all the best women for themselves and to sleep with them; they wouldn't share them with the other men. One of the men who was a guard got mad, and he and two of his friends just slipped into the bunch of Japs in the field. They knew we were treating them right and feeding them well and they weren't getting their fair share of the women, so they gave it up. Pretty much like any other man on that score."

He grinned and continued.

"They told us where the caves they were living in were, and where their water hole was and what time they visited it. We set up a public-address system at the water hole and took some of the Twenty-fourth Infantry up. We used one of our Jap interpreters and pleaded with them to come in. Told them we'd give them medical care—some of them were sick, we were told—and good food. About thirty or forty came over, mostly women and children. We pulled the p.a. system back and covered the area with mortar shells. Went in later and found pieces of what

looked to be thirty or forty dead Japs. I'm sure there are still quite a few holed up on Topatchau. They're a helluva odd lot, in a way."

I agreed with him. . . .

As time went on, Saipan became more livable, but in order to get around the island it was imperative to have a jeep or some sort of motor vehicle. Once you had the vehicle you had no serious problems except to keep it from being stolen. The roads were rapidly being improved, and should you run short of gasoline you simply drove to the nearest pump and had the attendant fill it up. If there was no attendant, you filled it up yourself!

Jeep-stealing became the biggest bugaboo. One day several of us went down to the navy air-base officers' club. In the melee of leaving, one of our number didn't get on our jeep. We didn't miss him. He simply started down the line of parked navy jeeps until he found one with the key in it, hopped in, drove it back to our area into a ditch and left it. It was an odd way for the ungrateful wretch to repay the navy's hospitality in allowing us the use of their club.

They retaliated a few days later, however. One of our squadron jeeps turned up missing for a week or so. Usually it was no trouble to find a missing jeep. Just turn the serial number over to the M.P.s and they generally found it parked some place on the island. But not so with this particular jeep. It took the island equivalent of the FBI to run it down. Some navy man had taken it, spray-painted it quickly a battleship gray and put a phony navy serial number on it. . . .

With cigarettes unrationed at five cents a pack, with beer ten cents a can, with an occasional good meal from the navy and with missions to Tokyo to fly, life on Saipan was becoming almost bearable!

# 11

## ANCHORS AWEIGH

I am one of the air force men who speaks highly of the navy hospitality—both surface and air arms. My healthy respect for them comes as a result of some practical experience I had on Saipan and in the Pacific.

We had not been on Saipan ten days when we learned that the Seabees had the magical wand of plenty. They had the materials, equipment and men to construct anything. Our entree was the fact that we were B-29 men, and the B-29 was new, publicized, sort of glamorous, I suppose. We edged our way into their groups and conversations and gradually brought the conversation around to the fact that we needed some lumber and nails to build shelves in our quonsets. Then one of us ventured, "Say, how would four or five of you men like to take a flight in a B-29 tomorrow? We're flight-testing one and we'd like to have you go. Just fly up north around the islands and maybe go over to Guam."

If they could get away they would all go. Our lumber and nails would inevitably show up the next day or two after the flight.

One squadron in our bombardment group built a spacious, well-appointed officers' club on material scrounged almost entirely from the Seabees. Some of it came as a result of B-29 rides, the rest was swapped for whiskey—the finest medium of exchange on the island. It was much better than dollars, for dollars had little use, while whiskey represented some recreation, an escape from worldly cares even for a short while.

Not only did the Seabees have building materials, they had food! Honest-to-goodness fresh eggs—not powdered; creamery butter—not tropical spread; pies, cakes, beef—fresh beef. And they seemed to have plenty of it!

One evening about suppertime I was stranded at the end of the island opposite from the one on which I lived. Major Vifquain, the group navigator, was with me. There was little chance of our getting back to our area in time to eat.

"There's a big Seabee mess hall over here some place. Let's find it and eat there," Vifquain suggested.

I was always agreeable to any plan that would furnish me with good food.

We drove our jeep around on the hilly trails until finally Vifquain pulled up in front of a huge, well-lighted quonset hut. This was it.

I would have walked in humbly, presented my situation meekly to the cook or whoever was in charge and thrown myself on his mercy. But not so Vifquain. He walked in haughtily, motioned with an impatient gesture to the cook standing at a range and spoke imperiously. "How about some food here? We're from the B-29 base over on the other side of the island. Can't get back in time to eat there. Some bacon and eggs and pie or something. We'll sit right here," pointing to a table already set.

Glory be, it worked! He had said it as though we were accustomed to fresh eggs, bacon and pie. We had not seen any of the three since we left the States months previously.

Our repast, served on clean white china, consisted of delicious fried eggs, crisp bacon, golden-brown buttered toast and a large wedge of mince-meat pie!

I was sold on the navy!

A few days later an ironical memorandum appeared on our bulletin boards.

HEADQUARTERS  
73RD BOMBARDMENT WING

SUBJECT: Instructions to Soldiers Returning to the  
United States  
To: SEE DISTRIBUTION

1. In view of the fact that some of the personnel of this command may soon be *forced* to accept an assignment in the United States, we are publishing this short practical guide on that foreign country.
2. The United States is composed of land; bisecting it in the center is the Mississippi River. Everything east of the river is known as New York, while everything west is simply called "Texas." There are a couple of other states that have been admitted to the Union, but they are not important.
3. Do not be inveigled into sleeping in one of the big, soft and mattress-covered beds so common in the States. Many cases of curvature of the spine have resulted from such practices. In order to get a comfortable night's sleep, it is best to carry a blanket and sleep on the floor.
4. Americans have the disgusting habit of bathing at least twice a week. Care must be taken when stepping into the shower, as hot water is fairly common and cases of scalding are often reported. Stay away from hot water as much as possible. People have been known to turn white as a result of using it too often.
5. Food is generally plentiful, but in some localities powdered eggs are almost impossible to obtain. You will probably be forced to eat the shell-covered kind on most occasions. Remember—DO NOT EAT THE SHELL; simply crack the eggs and toss away the outer covering.
6. By the same token, dehydrated vegetables are almost extinct in the United States. Stores feature potatoes, carrots, spinach and turnips in their own natural

state. You will notice pieces of soil still clinging to these items. Wash before eating.

7. In many restaurants you will see an item called "steak" on the menu. This dish is to be eaten with a knife and fork. Do not attempt to tear to pieces with your fingers. Steak has a meaty taste and isn't too revolting after one gets used to it. Of course, it doesn't come up to the luscious delectability of our very own Spam.

8. Water comes out of faucets unchlorinated; *remember*, it is wise to carry a small packet of chlorine with you. To make doubly sure of the safety of drinking water, place it in a Lister bag before using.

9. One must be cautious when ordering drinks in bars and saloons. Bartenders will try to sell old, aged stocks of scotch and bourbon. Don't be taken in by such practices. Some of the whiskey is 20 or 30 years old, and obviously spoiled.

10. The national language in the United States is Brooklynese. At first it will be difficult to understand such expressions as: "Da jernts sityated on da corner of toity-toid and toity-toid." When confronted with confusing conversations, simply say: "No cabeesh." The country is run by the Republicans, Democrats and Frank Sinatra. It's a big place because it stretches all the way across the country. Keep on our toes and you'll get along okay.

By command of Brigadier General O'DONNEL:

WALTER C. SWEENEY, JR.  
*Colonel, Air Corps,  
Chief of Staff.*

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Apologies to the  
copyright owner.

The naval air base had a nice mess hall in a screened quonset, I learned. I vowed to crack the place. One Sunday I did, but it was not without its price.

An air-force magazine for which I was Saipan correspondent wanted a story on a B-29 crew whose plane went down at sea; two or three out of the crew had lived to tell about it. I found one of the survivors, a navigator in the squadron next to mine. His had been a gruesome experience; he had spent a terrifying night in the ocean alone with only his life vest keeping him up. In a miraculous rescue he had been picked up by a navy air-sea rescue unit. The plane that discovered him took several pictures which I needed to go with the article. I made posthaste for the unit.

I got the negatives for the pictures and, in talking with some of the officers, I learned that they had several stories worth telling.

Beer was a luxury and difficult even for the navy men to get in case lots. I wangled a case out of our group PX officer after tearful pleading on bended knee. Then I iced it and, after making arrangements ahead of time, went down to the quonset on the beach where the crew of the navy plane that had discovered the lone navigator lived in comparative splendor.

I was in luck. Not only had they had some writable experiences, but they were congenial companions given to ribaldry and riotousness! When I appeared on the scene with my case of iced beer, which they consumed easily in the evening, I was in, brother, I was in!

They invited me to come down to their mess for a Sunday dinner. To wangle mere grudging permission to eat with them was no mean feat, but to receive a bona-fide, gilt-edged, scarce-as-hens'-teeth invitation was tantamount to an Iowa precinct committeeman being invited to dinner at the White House. I lost no time in accepting. I went the following Sunday.

It was all that I had heard and more than anyone had a right to expect—white tablecloths, heavy cloth napkins, colored messboys, white china, ample silverware and copious servings of

roast beef with all the trimmings, topped off with pie and ice cream. I could hardly believe I was on Saipan. They assured me that the meal was nothing extraordinary, just mine run. My God, what I would have given at that moment to have been in the navy air force!

I was told, although I can't vouch for it, that not more than five hundred yards of Saipan beachhead had been gained after the original assault, when the navy threw up an officers' club. It was only a tent, but it dispensed the usual cool liquid libations.

By the time I finally got around to it, it was a neat, frame, open-air building built on three levels on the side of a rocky Saipan hill. It was painted battleship gray.

I chanced to run across a college chum and fraternity brother, a navy doctor serving aboard a seaplane tender anchored in the harbor near what had once been Garapan, the little Saipan seaport. He mentioned that he frequently repaired to the navy officers' club in the afternoons and quaffed a few drinks. I evinced immediate interest. In view of our college ties, and the fact that I had once secured a tailor to make him a suit from cloth sold him by an itinerant Scotch peddler who came to the fraternity house, he graciously consented to take me over if I would pick him up in a jeep. I wangled a jeep. . . .

No money changed hands in the buying of drinks at this club. You bought a "chit" book and paid for everything in chits. The key to the use of the club was the chit book. If you had one, there were no questions asked. You ordered your drinks, handed the man chits and imbibed. My friend had a large supply of chits; we governed ourselves accordingly. In the course of the afternoon, I purchased two five-dollar chit books and thus was officially launched on the Saipan saloon circuit.

There was even a sprinkling of nurses and Red Cross girls about, the first women I had seen in many months. I observed in awe and distant admiration.

My only objection to the place was that it was open only two hours a day, from four to six o'clock in the evening.

But I had yet to learn more. The navy air-base officers' club

was a Saipan Stork Club. My air-sea rescue-unit friend gained me admission there. The bar was about thirty feet long and sported a solid mahogany top.

"We had to close the club down for three days while we installed the top," he explained proudly.

It was a beauty! In fact, the club was a beauty! It was on the sandy, white Saipan beach. The bar opened on a terrace which lay about a hundred yards from the rolling Pacific. There were tables in a room adjoining the bar, but unless there were ladies in your crowd you never bothered with them. The murals behind the bar were well drawn and clever. One showed three unshaven, hollow-eyed, ravenously hungry-looking men sitting in a liferaft in the ocean with three vulture-like birds hovering overhead. The caption read, "Is this trip really necessary?"

This Saipan bistro was primarily for the use and enjoyment of navy flyers. It was small and it had the added advantage of not only being open from four to six but also from seven to nine in the evening. It was usually well populated, and the conversation always revolved around flying.

Sometimes the younger of the navy flyers would launch forth in a song which became famous in the Pacific for its pungent humor and its farcical, risqué lyrics. The tune was nondescript, but the words were worth remembering. They went:

First they taught me how to fly, then they sent me out  
to die;

I've had a bellyful of war.

You can save those zeros for some goddamn heroes and  
distinguished flying crosses do not compensate  
for losses,

Buster—

(*Chorus*)

I wanted wings till I got the goddamn things,  
Now I don't want 'em any more.

I'll take the dames while the rest go down in flames;  
I've no desire to get burned.  
Air combat's no romance, oh, it makes me wet my pants,  
I'm not a flyer, I have learned.  
You can save those Mitsubishi's for the other sons-of-bitches.  
Oh, I'd rather lay a woman than be shot down in a Grumman,  
Buster— (*Chorus*).

I'm too young to die in a damned old P.B.Y.  
That's for the eager, not for me.  
I don't trust to luck to be picked up in a duck  
After I've crashed into the sea.  
Oh, I'd rather be a bellhop than a flyer on a flat-top  
With my hands around a bottle, not around a goddamn throttle,  
Buster— (*Chorus*).

I don't want a tour over Berlin or the Ruhr,  
Flak always makes me part my lunch.  
I get no "hey-hey" when they holler "Bombs Away,"  
I'd rather be home with the bunch.  
Now, there's one thing you can't laugh off, and that's  
when they shoot your ass off.  
Oh, I'd rather come home, Buster, with my ass than with  
a cluster,  
Buster— (*Chorus*).

For those few individuals who were flak-happy, the hour from six to seven when the bar was closed gave opportunity to concoct their own drinks. At the six o'clock closing hour a number of bar drinkers would leave a portion of their drinks untouched. The flak-happy ones were wont to gather all these drinks, pour them in a large shaker, mix thoroughly and stand back while the

contents were poured into glasses for imbibing. The results were sometimes amazing—shooting blue flame, curling white vapor and the disappearance of the person doing the mixing.

But the navy's most powerful and unusual drink was entirely homemade. It was like nothing that has ever before or since been brewed or distilled or even manufactured or constructed. It was a masterpiece.

The navy salts took one-half gallon of pure grain alcohol, mixed it with one-half gallon of distilled water, threw in a large bottle of maraschino cherries, an apple and an orange well cut up. This mixture was assigned to the shelf in some sort of an enclosed vessel. It had to remain there for at least a month, preferably longer, meanwhile fermenting or distilling or doing whatever it was such a monstrosity would do. The navy men claimed that, when it was on board ship, its fermenting was aided by the rolling of the ship. When they manufactured it on land, they supplied this lack by shaking the jug holding the swill several times a day.

At the end of the fermenting period, the cherries, apple and orange were drained off, leaving a liquid beautiful as a pink lady, tasty as the nectar of the gods and powerful as all hell! About three drinks of it and you cared not whether you were flying, driving, walking or crawling. Strangely enough, the hang-over wasn't bad, either.

The Waldorf-Astoria, Ritz-Carlton and Savoy-Plaza of navy officers' clubs was the Pacific Fleet Commissioned Officers' Club, which took the place of the earlier gray frame structure. I had not gone to the gray frame club for about a week or ten days—busy flying missions—when one day I raced down there, thirsty, in my trusty jeep. Lo and behold, there was no activity, no one present, nothing. Furthermore, no one around there could tell me anything about its disappearance. Like the Arabs, apparently, it had simply folded its tent and stolen away in the night. I spent my odd moments of the next two weeks ferreting out

what had happened. The navy had simply moved to newer, more spacious quarters. The old ones were too small, ill-situated, they said.

The new ones were humdingers—two huge quonsets located on the beach. The first contained a bar one hundred twenty feet long at which only liquor was sold, no beer. It was the longest straight stretch of liquor-dispensing equipment I have ever seen. It was usually quite crowded from four to six every evening.

Beer was dispensed in the other quonset at another bar, which also sold peanuts. Still farther down in the latter quonset, but partitioned off, was the senior officers' section. Its attendance was limited to majors, lieutenant commanders and above. In this section nothing but bonded bourbon and scotch was sold.

The beauty of it all was that beer was ten cents a can, and any liquid drink with any mixer they had, twenty-five cents. They seemed to have sufficient liquor, but they were short on mixer, hence the mixed drinks were extremely alcoholic.

Although I never saw it, I was told that the navy had a small, out-of-this-world club down on the beach at water's edge which was limited to commodores, admirals, generals and higher brass. I cannot vouch for this; I was not an admiral or a general in the war.

At that time, I was learning a great deal about enlisted men writing their congressmen about being discriminated against. I felt like writing my congressman and telling him I was being discriminated against, too. I couldn't get into the admirals'-and-generals' club!

# 12

## AIR RAID!

Somehow the Japs always seemed to have a unique, clairvoyant knowledge of the days I was going on missions. They always managed to keep the whole island and me up half the night before with a rip-snortin', thriller-diller, harum-scarum, hell-for-leather air raid. In fact, we had scarcely more than hit the island when they foisted their first one on us. I was scared!

Saipan was composed, at least as far down as anyone could blast, of hard coral. Technically speaking, it was not an island but a coral atoll. There was so much coral that entire hills were blasted and dug out and hauled away in trucks to make B-29 runways. There was about eighteen inches to two feet of mud, then solid coral. This was not conducive to the digging of adequate air-raid shelters. In fact, fifteen minutes of concentrated digging in such *soil* convinced even the most scared person that he would never protect himself in an air raid by such amateur methods. It required something more—something different, even though that something might not be as good as a hole dug directly down in the bowels of the earth some four to six feet.

That something was a sand-bag foxhole, not adequate protection in an air raid, but the best Saipan had to offer.

My quonset contained four of these strewn around it. There were ten officers in the quonset, so you can imagine the keenness of competition when a top-flight Jap air raid made its appearance. It was to-hell-with-rank-every-man-for-himself-and-the-devil-get-the-hindmost. And the devil got me once or twice, too!

A sand-bag foxhole was merely a space large enough to hold

one man—two if crowded to the point where arms and legs were bent and broken—surrounded by sandbags piled to a height of three or four feet. Nothing more lay between you and the Jap bomb. A near miss could blow you to smithereens—something that wouldn't be apt to happen if you had a “dug” air-raid shelter. But it was the best Saipan could muster to afford protection from air raids—at least, in the B-29 area!

Danger in an air raid lay not only in the falling bombs, but also, where I lived, in the sharp coral you traversed getting to the shelter and the sharp coral constituting the floor of the shelter. The soles of my feet were almost cut to shreds by a mad dash without shoes from my quonset to the nearest available shelter in the middle of the night. When I got to the shelter I threw myself headlong into it. My body looked like a well-diced steak.

The bad part of Saipan's air raids was that the air-raid warning system never seemed to be working, or working properly; or else a new one had just been installed and the operators weren't familiar with it, or a new one was just being installed and the old one just being dismantled and neither worked adequately; or else the damned thing just plain didn't work properly and was in the process of being tested.

I was sleeping heavily about two o'clock in the morning when whot-whot-whot-whot-whot, boom-boom-boom, rattat-tat-tat-tat woke me up abruptly. It was all new to me, I didn't know what was up. Further than that, my brain was dull and stupid from lack of sleep and proper food, and too much nervous tension. I sat dumbly on the side of my cot, blinking my eyes blearily when I heard someone in the other end of the quonset yell, “It's an air raid!”

I shot my feet in my shoes, jumped off the bed and burst out the door, flying toward the sand-bag foxhole. I hopped over the sacks of sand and spread-eagled on the coral. Hugging the ground as tightly as I could, I didn't even look up. My looking couldn't help anything and I was afraid I might see a leering Jap aviator

leaning out of a cockpit shaking his fist and shooting the Jap equivalent of a Tommy gun at me.

Suddenly I heard someone thunder up to the sand bags and jump over. I felt an enormous weight flop on me with all the vigor of a mechanical pile driver gone berserk. It was six-foot-two, two-hundred-forty-pound Handler, the bombardier. I damn near became a casualty at that moment. The wind was gone from me, I couldn't speak. I was afraid to move or gesture for fear the Nips would drop a bomb on me. I just lay there, more dead than alive, while Handler panted and heaved like a winded gazelle. He squirmed vigorously and tried to get even closer to the ground. I had the best of him there, as long as I was underneath. When my senses returned to me I realized that Handler even afforded me a little protection. Any shell fragments would lodge in that thick, fatty flesh of his instead of mine. I breathed a little easier—when I began to breathe at all.

All the anti-aircraft on the island must have been firing. The air was filled with tracers of all colors, and up above in the black sky you could see some fiery flak bursts. I saw no plane. I heard no plane.

Finally, Handler said, squirming, "Damn it, Snyder, move over and let me down on the ground, too."

I knew protection when I saw it. I ventured a lame excuse that even I couldn't swallow. "Hell, I can't even move, let alone move over. I'm paralyzed from the neck down on account of that bangin' you gave me when you jumped in."

He laughed nervously and began to squirm frantically and rock back and forth on top of me. The sharp coral bit into my skin. "Awright, get up a minute and I'll scoot over."

We lay there as the firing died slowly away. I ventured up on an elbow and took a look. I could see nothing but sky. I inched up a little more and looked. Nothing but the sky. I sat up a mite more and looked. Nothing but the sky. I bravely sat straight upright. At just that moment, the hugest, angriest sounding ack-ack gun on the island cut loose with a thunderous, steady barrage

aimed at what I hoped was an imaginary aircraft. I dropped back to the coral like a plummet, receiving an egg-sized lump on the side of my head for my efforts. Handler laughed heartily. I saw no humor in the situation.

I lay there and almost went to sleep.

I awoke with a start when I heard once again the familiar staccato-like whot-whot-whot-whot-whot-whot, boom-boom-boom-boom, rat-tat-tat-tat-tat of the island ack-ack. In the snatches when no guns were firing, and even above the clamor of the ack-ack, I could detect the low distant hum of engines. Cautiously, I turned my head slightly until my left eye was heavenward. I followed the ack-ack up to where most of it seemed to converge. There, glistening brightly in the weak moonlight, was a Jap plane crawling along. It was high, plenty high. Apparently those Japs were not eager to become dead heroes. From all the flak that was being thrown at them I didn't see how they could keep from getting hit. Nonetheless, the plane crawled on. I scarcely breathed.

Handler nudged me and whispered, "Snyder, do ya see that?"

"Yeah, by God. I wonder when he's gonna drop his bombs."

"Dunno, I'll bet the ack-ack gets him before he does. Look at that dumb bastard, he hasn't varied an inch from a straight course. They sure as hell got him tracked."

We watched. The ack-ack burst all around him, it seemed to burst almost at him, but still his engines hummed on merrily and the plane crawled slowly across the sky.

I whispered awesomely, "That takes guts."

"Guts, hell," Handler replied, "that's damn foolishness. If you ever catch me goin' over a target that long straight and narrow, you can bury me."

The plane crawled on and the ack-ack thundered and nothing else happened. The plane crept over us a little to our north and crawled on out over the ocean in the general direction of Tinian. From where I was lying, it looked to me as if the plane was a few miles beyond Saipan when I heard the shrill whistling, almost screaming, roar of the bombs dropping. Instinctively, I tucked

my head in behind the bottommost sand bag and waited. A thunderous, splashing swoosh and a low, muffled boom reverberated through the air. The bomb dropped harmlessly out in the ocean. The plane droned monotonously on its way and the ack-ack continued to snap at its heels. Presently the all-clear sounded. I trudged back to my cot. Sleep came quickly. . . .

Three days later when we returned from a Tokyo mission in darkness, the crew chief met us at the hardstand.

"They've been after us since ten o'clock this morning. Jap planes—single-engine ones—came over and just flew up and down the runways strafin' 'em and shootin' 'em up. Damnedest thing I ever saw. We were shootin' at 'em with everything, including carbines. They just kept it up until they got shot down. One of 'em cracked up down the strip a piece," he said, pointing.

"Some of that kamikaze outfit?" I asked, expecting the worst.

"Naw, couldn't be. These pilots looked like tramps. The one we picked up down here looked like he had on overalls. They were held up with a rope. Must have come down from Iwo. Those kamikaze boys are all duded up when they die. Black silk clothes and all that stuff. These Japs were nothing like kamikaze."

"Did they do a lot of damage?"

"Quite a bit. One of 'em clipped off a tail of a B-29 that wasn't on the mission. He took off about fifteen feet of the vertical fin just as pretty as you please. He cracked up. One guy cracked up on the runway, but he crawled out of the plane and started running. You shoulda seen us shoot him. We killed him so damn quick it'd make your head swim," he said viciously.

"Did you kill 'em all?" I asked.

"Yup, we got every damn one of 'em that I know about, but they did a lot of damage before we got 'em. They even got some of our men—some of 'em they just wounded. Hell, the Nips asked for it. You'd think they wanted to be killed the way they carried on. I'm tellin' yuh, they just flew down the runway firin' as fast as they could to the end, then they zoomed up and turned around and came back down low and went down the runway the other way. They just kept that up till they got shot down."

"Is that all that happened?" I inquired sadly.

"All?" he asked incredulously. "Hell's fire, whadda yuh want to happen? Ain't that enough? They damn near got us all."

I shut up.

That was just our initiation. More came later. The Japs were unusually good at finding out when we had missions scheduled for the next day. As sure as God made little green apples, they would be over the night before aiming for those B-29s up on the runways that were fully loaded with high explosive and incendiary bombs and with full tanks of highly inflammable gas.

One night before a mission six of us were sitting around in the quonset hut—quietly talking. Suddenly the air-raid siren began to blow, and in about ten seconds more our lights went out. The lights in our squadron came from power furnished by a captured Jap generator, and I could never quite decide whether it turned itself off in a Jap air raid in sympathy with its creators, or whether some of our men actually turned it off. Our men always claimed the latter. Frankly, I disbelieved them.

I hustled for the foxhole with all the speed at my command, closely followed by speedy, but lumbering, Handler. We lay there quietly squirming and gouging one another with knees, feet and elbows. Suddenly the ack-ack batteries on the eastern part of the island began their familiar whot-whot-whot-whot-whot-whot, boom-boom-boom, rat-tat-tat-tat-tat. The other batteries on the island joined quickly and the island rattled and shook like a Model-T Ford when the clutch is released. I hugged the ground.

This time I heard the hum of the Jap planes distinctly and for the first time I listened to the shrill whistle and shriek of many bombs falling. The concussion rocked us. Other bombs—many of them—hit and the concussion rocked us more. I hugged the coral tightly, dug with my fingers and prayed. At the same time the bombs were hitting, the ack-ack was going more furiously than before. We were throwing everything we had on the island at them. The din was deafening and terrifying.

Behind us, up on the hill where the bombed and gassed B-29s were waiting ready for tomorrow's mission, huge explosions rent

the air and angry flames licked high into the sky. The sky was lit a rosy orange which deepened as the minutes ticked by. As the roar and flames from the B-29 runways increased, the ack-ack died down and I mustered up enough courage to sit up.

"Damn it, Handler, look at that."

Handler sat upright and stared in awe. "There won't be a damn plane left in the morning, the way it looks."

The flames licked hungrily at a bomb bay full of high-explosive bombs and another explosion rocked us and shot flames high in the sky.

"There goes another one," I yelled, as a series of explosions rocked us again and again and the flames lit up the sky.

I sat there numb and helpless as more explosions continued to shake us and flames licked hungrily higher into the night. The high-octane gas eagerly fed them.

Finally, when it seemed that no more bombs could possibly explode and no more planes could possibly burn, the all-clear sounded and I dragged myself wearily back to my cot. . . .

This happened too often at first. It was costly of B-29s and men, and bad for the morale of the men flying them. As we stepped up our bombing of Japan and as the radar warning systems became more efficient, it gradually ceased, but not before it had taken its toll.

A good many of the Jap raids on Saipan were in the nature of harassing raids, rather than damaging ones. They were the kind that made you say angrily, "Those damn little bastards," and figuratively shake your fist at them. They got you out of bed at ungodly hours and tore up your sleep, but the amount of damage they did was not great.

Several nights later the Nips must have slipped through the radar warning net because the first I knew, ack-ack was firing furiously, shaking the quonset and the cot I was sleeping in. I leaped out of bed, flew through the door, turned right and started running on my now familiar course to the nearest foxhole. Just as I got about six or eight feet from the door, headed in the direction of the foxhole, the Jap came directly overhead at an

altitude of four or five hundred feet firing his machine guns as rapidly as possible. I ducked my head and ran harder. But before I reached the foxhole he was gone out over the water toward Tinian.

I knew then what was meant when people referred to a Jap plane as a "Messerschmitt Maytag." The motor had a tinny, hollow sound like the one our American-made Maytag washers used to make. The machine guns sounded as if they couldn't be any bigger than the equivalent of our .30-calibre gun. They would kill, all right, but they were considerably less lethal than the .50-calibre guns we had in our turrets. It didn't ease my mind any to know these things; we could still die by a Jap bomb or a bullet. But it made me a little contemptuous of Jap equipment.

The most terrifying of all the Jap raids was one which lasted only a few seconds and in which, so far as I know, not a bomb was dropped. One night I was awakened without warning by a thunderous volley of ack-ack. I sat stark upright on the side of my bed and, remembering my previous experience when my feet were cut to ribbons on the sharp coral, slipped into a pair of house slippers that I had placed at just the right spot in anticipation of such an emergency some night soon. In far less time than it takes to tell it, I was ready for my headlong dash to the foxhole. I vaulted off the bed and looked toward the door of the quonset for the first time.

The view was filled with all sorts of the worst, hideous-looking tracers that one can imagine. It was the equivalent of the most gigantic, stupendous, colossal ending of a Fourth-of-July fireworks display that man had ever conceived. And it was replete with authentic sounds. The display looked to me as if it were taking place right outside the door of the quonset and the sounds were as though they came from the roof of the quonset. For some reason I am not yet able to explain, I was utterly unable to make myself open the door, go out as usual and head for the foxhole. It was completely involuntary on my part and the motive or reason was not apparent. I just simply couldn't force myself out the door in the face of all the firing, even though I be-

lieved safety lay there—in the foxhole. Instinctively, I dropped to the plywood floor of the quonset. It afforded no protection whatsoever, but it was the only thing my inner sense would let my body do. I was paralyzed. I knew where saftety lay and yet I couldn't make myself go there. Something caused me to plop on the quonset floor and hug it tightly. The solution was beyond me.

Almost as abruptly as it began, the firing stopped. Cautiously, I got to my feet and walked outside. In a few minutes the entire squadron was out milling around, muttering obscenities and exhorting the deity in the name of the Japanese airmen who got us up in the middle of the night. We searched the sky in vain with our eyes, but never could we see the faintest glimmer of a Nip plane.

As we stood there, somewhat tensely, a great clatter rained down on the roof of the quonset next across from the one in which I lived. We all ducked instinctively and turned incredulously to look.

"Damn it," somebody in the crowd offered, "that must be some of that damn flak that was thrown up, coming back down on us."

Two weeks later, I saw a Jap plane blown to smithereens by our ack-ack. It was a solitary twin-engine Jap Betty crawling slowly along high in the sky. It was clearly limned against the sky in the pale, yellow moonlight. Our ack-ack had a field day. The tracers arched upward in the sky and appeared to converge at almost the exact spot where the Betty was flying. Still it inched along. The fireworks display continued. From where I was lying in my sand-bag foxhole the firing was particularly noisy. Just a few days before, the island anti-aircraft command had decided that there weren't enough gun emplacements positioned on the island near the B-29 living-quarters area. They had placed a big gun down on the beach near our quonset. It was joining the roaring, booming, spatting with all the vigor at its command. Its heavy, thunderous roar and earth-shaking recoil seemed almost on top of us, so close was it. I huddled in the foxhole, meanwhile cocking my eye heavenward to watch the path of the Jap Betty.

Just as the Betty got a little beyond what appeared to me to be

my zenith, there was a large blob of fire where the plane was and a subsequent quick, muffled explosion. Little sparks shot off the ball of fire that was the Jap Betty and fell quickly out of sight burning. Gradually, the ball itself started plunging downward in a hail of sparks and fire and, gathering speed, soon passed out of sight. We stood a moment in awesome silence, then gradually broke into a crescendo of approval that would have done credit to the West Point cadets after an Army touchdown.

Happily, that night, I went back to my cot and slept.

Air raids became an important part of our existence in the early Saipan days. They stayed with us until shortly before the marines made their initial assault on Iwo Jima. Most of the Jap planes that swooped down on us came from Iwo Jima. A good many of them flew down from Japan to Iwo Jima. There they landed, gassed up and loaded their bombs, if they hadn't already done so in Japan. The crews ate and stretched a bit. Then, after darkness crept over the Pacific, they took off and flew on to Saipan. The range of even the longest-ranged Japanese bomber precluded their bombing us in one hop from Japan to Saipan.

When Iwo Jima fell into American hands, the air raids stopped almost completely. But before they did that, they made it hot for us for a while. They caused us to lose a lot of sleep, too.

But more important, we lost a lot of men's lives, good, honest, God-fearing American men's lives, and it was tough to see them go—plenty tough.

# 13

## IWO JIMA AND CHRISTMAS

Our group, the 499th, didn't seem to be doing so well at getting our planes to the target, and even when we did get them there, at hitting the target. It was believed we needed more practice. It was determined that we would bomb Iwo Jima on December 24, 1944, while the other groups were having a little respite over the Christmas holidays. It was felt that if we had to work while others loafed, we might thus be encouraged later to be more determined in getting our bombs on the target. The Great White Father had spoken. We would fly.

Our squadron would lead the group, and I was to be navigator in the lead squadron. We gathered together a nondescript crew composed of the squadron bombardier, squadron radar man, gunners and radio operators from the crew of *Um-briago-Dat's My Boy* and myself.

By comparison, this would be a milk run. We wouldn't have briefing until eight o'clock in the morning and take-off time would be around nine-thirty or ten. We would be back to Saipan in the late afternoon. We would carry a heavy bomb load and bomb from fifteen thousand feet. The bombing would have the added effect of softening Iwo Jima up a little more. It was common knowledge that sooner or later Iwo was going to be assaulted by American troops. Flak was usually light over Iwo and there hadn't been any fighters up there for some time.

We took off with our heavy bomb load and followed the flight plan. Since we were leading the entire formation, it fell to my lot to figure the exact time when we were to begin our climb

to altitude. At briefing we were told that the lead plane was to fire a Very signal two minutes before the climb and another at the instant the climb began. The hatch from which the Very pistol was fired was right above my head. I remembered to pull the spring latch which opened the cover on the fuselage at the two-minute signal; but in the hustle and bustle of firing the second signal at the moment of climb, I forgot to pull the spring latch again. As a result, I shot away part of the fuselage.

When we got to altitude and arrived at our I.P.—a point on the ocean that was given us at briefing—I gave the signal to turn on the bombing heading. Iwo Jima was nowhere to be seen, but there was considerable cloud cover up ahead. We flew on and I called the radar operator, "Mickey from Navigator, will you set up the mickey with the data given us at briefing and show the bomb-release line? It looks like we might have to drop by mickey."

"Roger, Navigator, will do."

The bombardier was scanning carefully ahead trying to find Iwo and calling back to me about every thirty seconds, "Navigator from Bombardier, I can't find that damned island to save my neck. If you find it on the scope, let me know where, so I can look better."

"Roger, are you going to set up your bombsight so that if we can bomb visually, you'll be in shape to do it?"

"Roger, I've got the data set in it now. If I can see the target I'll bomb visually."

We flew in toward what should have been Iwo Jima. The radar set would give good reception for awhile, then fade so that nothing on the scope was clear. The radar operator and I kept jabbering back and forth on the interphone about it, and he kept saying he was tuning and retuning the set to get better reception. Finally, almost twenty miles ahead we spied on the scope what we thought was Iwo Jima. As we got into the ten-mile range, it came in more clearly. The set was still fading badly and we were going to have trouble bombing by it. We came to within five miles of Iwo and the radar operator switched to the five-

mile range. The set still faded badly and we constantly yelled back and forth on the interphone, I urging him to try to tune it better, and he insisting that he was doing everything possible to get good reception. In the meantime the bombardier was screaming into the interphone about not being able to see the target and not being able to bomb visually. We were all having a shouting good time. Suddenly, in a momentary break in the interphone conversation, "Navigator from Pilot, if we can't get good reception on our mickey, we'd better drop back and let one of the wing ships lead us over the target."

I was stunned for a moment! But I recovered my senses and my voice blew up, "We're gonna play hell dropping back and letting someone else lead us over the target. I didn't lead all the way up here to peter out when we got to the target. We're gonna take 'em over the target unless it's absolutely physically impossible. They told us at briefing that if things weren't right on the initial run on the target to go around and make a second run on it. Let's do that before we turn the lead over to somebody else. Those Japs down there aren't going to shoot us down. By God, I'm bitter if we aren't first over the target."

The pilot's voice, "O.K., O.K., take it easy. But let's see if we can't get the bombs away on the first run."

By that time we were getting close to Iwo.

"Navigator from Bombardier, I see the target. I've got it. I'll take over."

"Roger, Bombardier. O.K., Mickey, it looks like we can relax a minute."

I leaned back in my seat, took off my earphones and throat mike and scooted up forward behind the bombardier to get a good look at Iwo Jima.

There were a few bursts of flak near us but nothing very dangerous. There were no buildings and no sign of life on Iwo Jima.

Famed Mount Surabachi, upon whose summit the marines would soon place the United States flag and be snapped in a memorable picture, loomed up below. The runways were in the

form of an "X" and stretched away from Mount Surabachi to the north. The bombardier's aiming point for dropping was the intersection of the runways. He was bent tensely over the bombsight, twisting its knobs rapidly. Just before the indices on the bombsight met—when they meet the bombs are released—he came off the bombsight momentarily. Then he put his head back down on the eyepiece. I didn't hear the usual click when the indices met, signifying that the cocked bombsight trigger was released and the bombs were dropped. I looked quickly and realized that the bombardier had done a splendid job of bombing except for one thing—he had failed to cock the trigger and the bombs weren't released when the indices met! In less time than it takes to tell about it, the co-pilot grabbed the toggle button and punched it. We felt a slight lurch as the bombs began to tumble out of our bomb bays one after another.

The bombardier still had his head on the eyepiece of the bombsight to see whether or not the crosshairs remained on the target.

When he raised up, he turned around and shouted triumphantly, "It's a shack!" (Direct hit.)

In a psuedo-serious manner, the pilot said, "Whadda ya mean, a shack? You forgot to cock the trigger."

The bombardier's eyes darted back to the bombsight and his right hand found the trigger and held it meditatively. Slowly he turned his head around again with a look of amazement that turned to a sheepish grin.

"Well, I'll be damned!"

No one said a word for about thirty seconds, then the co-pilot grinned. "It's all right. I hit the toggle button about three or four seconds after the indices met. You still got a shack."

The bombardier and I leaned far forward in the nose to watch the bombs hit. He got his shack, all right. . . .

That night, of course, was Christmas Eve. Shortly after we got back from the mission we had our Christmas in our quonset hut.

Some time before, a couple of officers who lived in our quonset had fixed up what we called our Christmas tree. The trunk

was made from a piece of two-by-two wood and the branches of smaller wood nailed on at angles. It was covered with red and green crepe paper from God-only-knows-where. From each of the branches dangled a wrapped gift with the recipient's special nickname on it. These nicknames had been given each man by all the other men in the quonset, either because of some funny happening or some idiosyncrasy.

One present read, "From Santa Claus to Shaky." Shaky got his nickname by waking up at three o'clock one morning shouting at the top of his voice, "AIR RAID! AIR RAID!" when there was none. His nerves had gotten the better of him for a while. Another gift read, "From Santa Claus to Bulb-nose." The recipient had a nose that looked like a well-lit Christmas-tree bulb. Another said, "From Santa Claus to Scarface," a nickname bestowed because, in an air raid in the middle of the night, he had sprung out of bed like a charging bull and hit his nose and head a terrific blow on the shelves near his bed. It skinned him up considerably and almost knocked him unconscious. My gift read, "From Santa Claus to Pelican," and alluded to my double chin, the lower of my two chins representing the baggy underpart of the beak where the pelican allegedly stores dead fish.

After supper the gifts were passed out and the evening's festivities began. Bottles of whiskey that had been bought back in the States, locked in the plane and stashed away upon arrival on Saipan, were broken out and opened. Everyone began drinking with more gusto and enthusiasm than I had ever seen any of them do before. I declined a drink.

"Snyder, whatsa matter with you? I never saw you turn down a drink before."

"I've turned down a few, you just haven't been around," I replied wryly. "For some reason I can't bring myself to drink on Christmas Eve. It seems like a sacred time and I can't do it. I know I'm probably crazy, but that's the way I feel."

Everything was fairly peaceful when—*whoosh-BANG*—the screen door in the quonset was hurled open and in marched the bombardier of the crew with which I had flown my first mission.

He marched straight through with his head turned to one side, holding aloft a large metal ladle and shouting at the top of his lungs.

"Merr' Chrishmash, come vishish ush! Merr' Chrishmash, come vishish ush!"

He never slowed nor hesitated and marched on out the door at the other end of the quonset. Our eyes followed him in amazement until he disappeared from view. Obviously, he had overimbibed tremendously.

"Holy mackerel, what's goin' on next door?" someone asked in wonderment. As if in answer, someone stuck his head in the door and shouted, "They really have turned one on next door. You oughta see it."

I accepted the suggestion and walked over to the quonset. Our friend had made a colossal understatement. They had engaged in ribaldry the likes of which had never been engaged in since the days of Peter the Great in Russia.

They had cleared about twenty feet in one end of their quonset and had placed there a huge metal mixing bowl that they had apparently borrowed from the mess hall. Most of the fluid that had been in the bowl, a vile yellowish-brown-looking liquid, was gone. I knew not what it was and, since it had caused my bombardier friend a mental paralysis, I dared not place even a drop of it on my tongue, but I was sure it was something stronger than the pure juice of a lemon.

The scene was one of extreme merriment. The floor was wet and slippery and the bombardier was on the floor more than he was on his feet. He would manage to struggle to his feet when WHAM! down he would go in a fall that would have easily broken his pelvis and a rib or two had he been sober. While on the floor after a hard fall, he gaily crowed, "Snyder, c'mon in and ha' a drink, ya sissy."

And usually he was such a quiet, retiring lad. I watched for a few minutes while he slithered around up and down on the wet floor—it was comical yet tragic—then returned to my quonset and tried to get to sleep. The merrymaking went on for some time,

but after pleading with the men to hold it down to a college yell, I finally drifted off to sleep. . . .

There were very few men at dinner on Christmas Day in our squadron. It was just as well, for we only had Spam again. There were not many more present for supper.

I distinctly recall that the bombardier in the next quonset did not come to any meals Christmas Day, nor even the day after. I saw him hobble to dinner the third day. He had a bad limp and held on tightly to the navigator's arm. He was a very quiet and subdued man.

Tell me, is alcohol a stimulant or a depressant?

# 14

## NOW, IF YOU'RE CAPTURED . . .

Combat losses for the 73rd Wing were running to almost one fourth of the flying personnel. This was high compared to about five-to-eight per cent expected and usual losses. We were not losing all the planes and men by flak and Jap fighters; the greatest share were lost before reaching the target and after leaving it. Capture and use of Iwo Jima could alleviate much of this loss. Planes were having mechanical failures which precluded their getting all the way back to Saipan; most of them could have made it to Iwo Jima. Others were being shot up over the target, so that they were able to get part way, but not all the way, back to Saipan. Had Iwo Jima been under American control they could have limped in there, as many of them later did. All of them were now ditching in the Pacific. Air-sea rescue just couldn't keep up with the tremendous task of finding and picking up all of them.

The immediate effect of such losses was to make all combat crewmen extremely jittery. Morale was at a low ebb. One result was the publishing of a lengthy memorandum entitled: "Evasion, Survival and Escape."

This memo outlined the best methods of ditching, and related in detail the vegetation, terrain and population, weather, food and reptiles and insects one could expect on all the islands, inhabited and uninhabited, to the north of Saipan.

More importantly, it brought a naval and a marine officer from the office of CINCPAC (Commander-in-chief, Pacific) to give us the latest information on how we could expect to be treated if

we were captured. The outlook was somewhat better than that painted back in the States, but it was still dismal.

"All officers below the rank of lieutenant-colonel can expect to be treated like enlisted men. Probably rougher at interrogation, because the Japs think you know more. And by the way, don't ever use the word 'Jap' in the presence of a Jap! They detest it and consider it insulting and degrading. Refer to them as Japanese always."

"If you are shot down, try to get picked up by the Japanese military as quickly as possible. The civilians will kill you—either club you to death or shoot you. The military would like to—don't get too optimistic—but they usually don't dare because you're worth more to them alive than you are dead. At least till they get all the information out of you they can. Then, unfortunately, our information indicates they may kill you."

We laughed, but hollowly.

"If you should get shot up over Japan and can go down either on land or water, choose the water. The Jap navy and the army are mad at each other and the navy will treat you much better than the army. The navy blames these bombings you're giving Japan on the army and is trying to discredit the army. They may not even turn you over to the army for a long while. In the meantime, you'll be comparatively well housed and well fed."

I mentally filed that bit of information, determined that by hook or crook I would go down in the ocean rather than on land.

"Now, as to what you can tell them when they begin interrogating. We have talked with Washington for weeks trying to get them to tell us what you could and could not say about the B-29. Just a few days ago, they told us that you people who fly 'em can tell the Japs anything you know about the plane because you don't know anything."

We laughed, this time a belly laugh.

"No, seriously," he continued, "you know about the speed, bomb load, range, armament and all that sort of thing. The Japs probably already know that. If they don't, they can find it out. You don't know any of the technical aspects of the engine,

or the computing gun sights, or the radar set, or the navigational sets. That's what they need to know if they are to be able to build a plane like the Superfort. So tell 'em anything you know about the B-29, but don't try to fool 'em, they're too smart for that."

I relaxed ever so slightly and listened on in a slightly happier frame of mind.

"Now, we know that you have heard a lot about the Japs killing prisoners who stood fast on international law and refused to tell more than their name, rank and serial number. They have done it many, many times, but it doesn't have to happen to you if you use your head. A lot of those people that were killed for that sort of thing were the ramrod-backed West Pointers who were captured early in the war. They got nasty about it and the Japs just lopped off their heads. Don't get nasty with a Jap, that's one cardinal principle to remember. They are an obsequiously polite race and your cue is to be even more polite than they are. You will probably be interrogated by a sergeant. Treat him as though he were your infinite superior; it will pay dividends.

"As the war gets nearer to the Japanese homeland, the more they are inclined to treat the prisoners a little better, for the more they are afraid of losing the war. One of the few Jap officers of any rank that we captured, we took right here on Saipan. He's in our office in Hawaii. We checked him as thoroughly as we could, and so far we've found he has always told the truth. We rely on him pretty heavily and he has the run of the office. He was an officer in the field artillery on the Japanese general staff in Tokyo. Somehow he fell into the bad graces of the powers that be and, just before the battle of Saipan began, they shipped him here. He was just bitter enough that he didn't commit hara-kiri like the rest—he became a prisoner of war. He has been invaluable to us. The largest share of the information I have just given you we got from him. We checked his background, and we even now check and cross-check the information we get from him. It hangs together so far."

For some reason, I wanted to meet this officer. He had just boosted my morale considerably.

The naval lieutenant continued. "Our sketchy reports indicate that you B-29 men can expect a little rougher treatment than the average prisoner of war. You are classified differently, for a couple of reasons. First, because you're flying the B-29, and, second, because you are bombing the homeland. I think the logic behind the first reason is apparent, but that behind the second may be a little more subtle. I'll explain the psychology of it.

"Before you airmen came along the average Japanese civilian was not acutely aware of the war going on. Oh, yes, he had sent his sons, or a wife her husband, and there have been some privations and hard work. But the Nip is a stoical super-patriot who is eminently accustomed to privations and hard work. The war was no great blow to him. Now you have come along and are burning up the city he lives in, his friends' homes, the war-manufacturing factory where he works. Perhaps you have killed some of his relatives or friends or have injured him. He really knows there's a war on now, and the air force represents all the bad aspects of it. All the blame and all his bitterness and anger are vented on you. If you go down where he can get near you, you're going to get beat up or shot.

"Another point you might remember is this. If you have to go down over Japan, try to pick the countryside as far distant as possible from the cities you have bombed. For the same reasons I just gave you, the Jap out in the rural area or the smaller island towns and cities where you haven't bombed won't be as apt to kill you as the Jap in Tokyo, Nagoya, Kobe or Osaka where you've bombed. In fact, you may be somewhat of a curiosity and you'll be treated with a little awe and respect. As you realize, that will end when the army gets hold of you."

One of the men over on the side of the building opposite where I was sitting held up his hand. The lieutenant looked over that way finally, spied the upraised hand, hesitated a moment, then quickly asked, "A question? Go ahead."

"Lieutenant, what can you tell us about what we can expect if we go across Japan to Russia? We've heard all sorts of stories, from those saying they will shoot us down to those saying they will treat us like heroes. There could be a time when we could get a few hundred miles to Russia but couldn't get all the way back to Saipan."

The lieutenant grinned mischievously. "I'm glad you asked that, Comrade, it about slipped my mind. We're not sure what will happen if you go on over to Russia. First of all, you realize you would probably want to gain as much altitude as you possibly could. It is several hundred miles right across the heart of Japan. A lone B-29 would be like a sitting duck, even at high altitude. You would be taking a chance.

"If this operation that is just now getting ready to make the assault is successful, you'll be much better off trying to get back there and land. You all know the one I'm talking about although we're not supposed to mention it. (He was referring to the assault on Iwo Jima, then about to begin.)

"Our government is negotiating with Russia now to see if you can't make a safe landing there in case of emergency. The Russians, we've found, are unpredictable. One minute they are your bosom pals, the next they would shoot you down in cold blood. One time when you go up there, they might send Yak fighters up to escort you in, and the next time they come up and shoot you down. That's the best information I can give you now. You'll just have to take your chances. Do everything possible to identify yourself as a friendly American B-29 seeking help. Just as soon as negotiations are completed we'll notify you of the outcome."

He thought a moment, then added briskly, "By the way, just a remark on the terrain you'll meet in Russia. The way you go in from Japan, you'll fly across some high mountains just a few miles inland from the coast. Then you'll hit a long stretch of rough, wooded terrain where there are no landing fields and hardly a safe spot to make an emergency landing. Then, after several hundred miles, you'll begin to get to more level, rolling country. There are some six bases there that you can use. I under-

stand the B-29 needs an unusually long runway so I don't know what your problem is there. You know more about that than I do.

"Oh, yes, one more thing. You will be ill fed by the Japanese. We don't know what the fare is now, but our Jap officer tells us that they were feeding prisoners some watery gruel made from rice and carrots, or a rice ball or two a day. Whatever it is, it won't be much. I'm sorry to have to tell you that our informant tells us a lot of prisoners were dying from malnutrition as well as from mistreatment."

He paused a moment and lit a cigarette. "Are there any more questions? All right, thanks for your attention. We're working all the time to learn more to tell you and to better your lot if captured. Good luck to you. . . ."

Somehow, as I walked away from the lecture, I began to believe that flying up to Japan was dangerous, might even be fatal.

# 15

## GENERAL LEEMY MOVES IN

In group headquarters, there was soon to be an opening, due to the recent inclusion of a radar-tactics officer on the staff. It was broadly hinted by my squadron commander that I was the one receiving the most serious consideration. I was ahead on missions; if I were out of the squadron that would give a first lieutenant an opportunity to step in as squadron navigator and an opportunity for a promotion. It was ideal for the squadron. I felt it was a damn sight far from ideal for me. The group job only called for a captain—no promotion possible; it would funnel me into the strictly radar field, which I didn't want; it would keep me, I felt, from keeping up on my mission flying. I squawked—loudly!

I was finally able to avoid taking the job, but I couldn't avoid being transferred to group headquarters as an assistant operations officer. Needless to say, I fell rapidly behind in the number of missions flown; somebody else forged ahead.

It was about this time that "General Leemy" took over. Things began to pop! Almost from the time LeMay arrived, we were at war in earnest.

Our missions went on as before, except we came down from ten to fifteen thousand feet on our bombing altitude! We began bombing at around fifteen to twenty thousand feet, and once or twice we went over the target in broad daylight at twelve thousand feet. Things began to get really rough and we began to lose more planes and men over the target than we formerly had. But I'm reasonably certain we got our bombs on the target, and I was never certain before.

It wasn't too bad as long as we were bombing the target downwind—that is, when we were going across the target, Tokyo or Nagoya or whatever the city was, the same way the wind was blowing. In that event, we were making somewhere from three hundred and fifty to four hundred and fifty miles per hour ground speed. We had a fighting chance. However, if we went over the target upwind, our ground speed was anywhere from one hundred to two hundred and fifty miles per hour. We were sitting ducks!

We all became ardent crusaders for downwind *only* bombing runs!

And at the time, we were practically bombing only two targets—Tokyo and Nagoya. We would fly up to the coast of Japan about the same way to bomb either target. I felt that one day we turned downwind and bombed Tokyo and the next day we turned upwind and bombed Nagoya. I claimed that the Nip fighters took off when they heard we were near the coast, that they circled like ducks—vicious, killing ones, that is—then they all assembled about midway between Nagoya and Tokyo as pretty as you please and waited on us. When they saw which way we turned they descended on us like vultures. In that way the Nips could use fighters based in the areas around Tokyo as well as Nagoya and could assemble them and send them all on us whichever way we turned.

We also became ardent crusaders for more targets than Tokyo and Nagoya!

General LeMay sat in at critiques for lead crews which were held in the 73rd-Bombardment-Wing briefing room after each mission. He sat quietly, watchfully waiting and listening in the corner while chomping on his inevitable cigar.

At one a major from the 500th Bombardment Group had taken the wooden pointer and was up on the stage in front of the huge operations map pointing out the route used by the formation he led in his last mission and attempting to explain why his forma-

tion had dropped its bombs on a so-called "target of opportunity" instead of on the assigned target.

"We flew along the briefed courses here," he gestured with the pointer to the red line on the map, "but when our ETA for the coast came up, there was a solid undercast. The navigator wasn't sure where he was, so we followed the briefed course to what we thought was the I.P. and turned on the axis-of-attack. It was still undercast but we finally broke out. There was nothing but rice paddies down below. We turned and headed back in the direction of the coast when we came on this city right here (pointing). We're pretty sure that was it because it was in the target folder and the bombardier and navigator both identified it. I ordered the bombs dropped visually so the bombardier set up his bombsight and dropped. We weren't able to observe the results because we hit some undercast right after we left the target. The bombardier thinks he got good results." (All bombardiers always think they get good results if you can't see the bombs hit.)

General LeMay arose from the frail wooden chair in which he was sitting in the back of the room, pulled the cigar from his mouth and, staccato-like, yet drawlingly, asked, "Major, do you mean to tell me you bombed that target crosswind at fifteen thousand feet?"

The major was caught off balance for a moment and, apparently to gain a little more time to concoct an answer, he nervously asked, "What's that, sir? I didn't get your question."

General Lemay repeated the question word for word more slowly than before, this time not even removing the cigar from his mouth.

The major was caught flat-footed. Bombing crosswind, that is, with the wind blowing from your right or left instead of from behind you or in your face, almost inevitably led to bombs missing the target. Except in the most unusual emergency, it was extremely poor bombing procedure. The major looked around at the map quickly, then back to LeMay, then rapping the pointer

in the palm of his hand rapidly a couple of times and finally realizing he was stuck, said, "Yes, sir, General, that's right."

LeMay spat out the words. "That's damn poor leadership, Major. Sit down!"

The major sat down.

LeMay strode back and sat down.

We knew it was strictly General Leemy's circus from then on!

Shortly after that incident we received notice that our next raid would be a night one, with only a skeleton crew, some of our armament and armor stripped, at lower altitude and with a larger load of bombs. The bombs would be incendiaries, with one or two HEs (high explosives) to blast the incendiaries around well.

Because we had less armor and armament and fewer crew members, we weighed less. Because we weighed less we wouldn't need so much gasoline. Because we weren't going so high we would need less gasoline. What we saved in the way of weight in gasoline, we added in bombs!

We got our first briefing. The target was Tokyo. Our altitude was staggered from five thousand to eight thousand feet, depending on which unit you were in; we left the CFC gunner and the two waist gunners off the crew; we took the armor out of the bomb bays and in other places around the plane; we took the 20-mm. cannon out of the tail; and this was to be a maximum-effort raid. Every plane that could stagger into the air was going.

We were stunned. We didn't even need oxygen masks at that altitude. Some wit composed the phrase that became the battle cry of the Superfort men.

Throw your oxygen mask away,  
General LeMay is here to stay!

Along about dusk on the evening of the first mission I rode up to the flight line with the group chaplain to watch the men get off. I couldn't wangle my way on this mission in any way. They

were not taking any observers and there was no need for an extra navigator in any of the crews.

We went from crew to crew, the chaplain saying to each one in turn, "Good luck, men. Your chaplain will be praying for you."

I noticed that most of the crews seemed to be in good spirits, but they were apprehensive and tense. They stood around in knotty groups, talking and laughing nervously, fingering the bandoliers that were slung over their shoulders. Some talked of their amorous conquests in the States—in Wichita, Kansas City, Los Angeles, San Antonio—or the amorous conquests they had missed, or those that they would like to make and sure as hell would make once they got back to the States. Others shouted obscenities about the forthcoming missions. None spoke seriously of death or capture. Once they let serious thoughts of that nature take over their minds, they were washed up for combat. They kept, of necessity, their conversations light and kidding. They laughed and joked and called each other by their nicknames—"Speedball," because he was a crackerjack softball pitcher; "Lover," because of his hotel-room conquests in Wichita; "J.P. Dooley, the third," after the title of the song popular at that time and because the first two initials of his name were J.P.

The plan was for the crews to leave about dusk, fly up to the target individually, fire-bomb the target individually at each one's assigned altitude around one or two o'clock in the morning, and return to Saipan individually.

Our planes soared off the runway one by one and headed directly for Japan. I stood and watched as the full Saipan moonlight shone down on the sleek, silver skins of the Superforts. . . .

The next morning I awoke to learn that, according to the crews that were on the mission, it was a howling success. Tokyo burned exceedingly well and the flak and fighters weren't too bad. We lost some planes and men, but nothing like the number we might have expected to lose at such an altitude.

The following day the group operations officer caught me as I was coming out of the group operations quonset.

"Hey, Snyder, you wanna go on a mission tonight?"

"I sure as hell do. What's up?"

"Oh, some crew in the 877th Squadron has a plane that they say is slow and burns too much gasoline. They want us to try it tonight and see how it is. We're goin' to Osaka on another of those fire raids. I got Major Polanski here in operations to go along as co-pilot and that bombardier they sent over from the States for an instructor as bombardier. Now all I got to get is a tail gunner and a radar man. If you get any ideas, lemme know. Briefing's at four o'clock, have to be up at the plane at five-fifteen."

"O.K., I'll be over at briefing."

At briefing we had been warned to stay at least seventy-five miles away from Iwo Jima. The marines had landed. But they, as well as the naval vessels surrounding Iwo, were trigger happy. They had a way of shooting you down first and then discovering whether it was friend or enemy. I made a mental note that I would stay at least a hundred miles away from Iwo. There was some sort of radio station established there and, as we passed abreast of where I thought Iwo was, I tried to tune in the radio and watch the compass needle. The needle hunted badly, indicating either extremely bad weather, jamming by the Japs or an unusually weak station, perhaps all three.

A few minutes later I got my sextant, quickly moved to the astro-dome and shot two stars. Then I went back to my desk and began hurriedly to compute and plot the two-star fix that the shots would give me. I had on the radar scope over my desk and, from time to time, I glanced at it carefully to see if anything unusual was coming up. Frequently there would be a large mass or two showing on the scope which I took to be a cloud or so. We were flying at about forty-five hundred feet.

Suddenly I heard the interphone crackle with words tumbling over each other. "Pilot from Tail Gunner, le's get outa here! They're shootin' at us from below."

I looked out my window. The sky was lit up with red and blue flashes below us and some reddish-gray and green flashes off our left wing. We immediately dived slightly and the pilot

applied almost full power. We surged ahead, then wriggled to the right and to the left. The flak followed us. I began to sweat. They had our altitude figured out practically on the nose, for the flashes were right at our level. If they got directionally accurate, we were gone.

I couldn't figure out which it was, naval vessels or a Jap island. Sweating, I scrutinized my map closely. I couldn't believe we were so far off course that we were over our own navy or over Iwo Jima. We continued to get the bursts; they crept closer. We turned right and then left in quick evasive action—and prayed!

Almost as quickly as it started, it stopped.

I looked out my window, afraid to believe the firing had stopped and afraid to believe it hadn't. There were no signs of flak any longer, no flashes, no lights, just God-given darkness. Slowly, incredulously, I relaxed in my seat and wiped the sweat off my forehead and cheeks. I pulled a cigarette from the pack on my desk and lit it. My hands trembled visibly. I was too shaken to do more than sit for a moment. Over the interphone, without the usual formality, the pilot shot, "Snyder, where the hell were we? Did you let us get too close to Iwo?"

"Just a minute till I get this fix plotted and I'll tell you exactly where we were."

I computed as quickly as I could and plotted my fix. I drew a line from the last position prior to the fix and extended it through the fix and beyond. It showed our course to have been directly over Minami-Iwo Jima, the island just north of Iwo Jima. Minami was still Jap-held.

We flew on toward Osaka.

Osaka is situated at the head of a large bay. In order to bomb it, it was necessary to fly up the bay or else come in from the east or west. To the west of Osaka lies Kobe, a city which had some of the largest flak batteries of any city in Japan. Coming in from the east one passed over several smaller Jap cities whose names I never paid any particular attention to. Our intelligence told us, rather reliably, that they were all well protected by

ample flak batteries. The shortest, most direct route was to come up the bay.

As we drew near the coastline of Japan we had little difficulty determining where the target was. Osaka's burning lit up the sky so that it could be seen easily from the air for miles and miles. Our bombing altitude was eighty-one hundred feet.

I slipped into my flak vest and helmet along with all my other paraphernalia and sat at my desk barely able to move. We drove on toward the target, the huge flames and thick black smoke looming ever larger. The bombs were to be dropped by radar, so I called the radar man. "Mickey from Navigator. We're getting close. Will you set up the bomb-release line when we get on the proper range? When the edge of Osaka passes the line we drop. By the way, can you pick up other planes on that set? If you can it may help us because it looks like we may be in dense smoke up here. Somebody is liable to ram us if we're not careful, over."

"Navigator from Mickey, I have the instructions on the bomb-release line and I'll set it up. This appears to be a pretty good set, so I may be able to pick up other planes on the scope. I'll watch 'er carefully."

"Roger, I wish you would. It might save our lives."

"Crew from Pilot, we're going over the target at 310 miles per hour. If there is any variation from that, I'll exceed that speed rather than go slower. I don't intend to be over the target any longer than absolutely necessary. I'm looking at it now and it looks like it will be bad. Any questions, over?"

No one said a word. Apparently everyone was in agreement that, in case of doubt, we should go too fast rather than too slow.

Suddenly, I had an idea. "Mickey from Navigator. I wonder if you would give the bombardier the signal to drop. I'd like to go up forward to see what's going on, over."

"Navigator from Mickey. Will do, over."

Slowly, heavily, I squeezed between my desk and the four-gun turret and inched forward. As I came up on the flight deck

I looked forward out of the plexiglass nose of the plane. The holocaust that met my eyes required seeing to warrant believing. There was one huge bonfire with flames licking almost to the altitude we were flying. Dense black smoke lay everywhere. As we drew nearer it was evident we were going to fly through the densest part of the smoke. We would be lucky, it looked to me, if we didn't fly through some flames! I recoiled slightly. I did not envy the bombardier who sat up front in the nose. I huddled deeper into my flak vest and helmet. Without turning, the pilot said, "This is gonna be rough."

I couldn't find an adequate answer. Silently, I nodded.

We flew into the less dense edges of the smoke forest and began to smell the acrid fumes. The incendiaries we were dropping were made of napalm, a gelatinous, sticky substance which splattered upon impact and stuck tightly to whatever it hit. It burned with fiendish intensity.

The smoke became thicker, the fumes stronger. The pilot pushed the throttles forward and the B-29 leaped ahead.

I looked out the window toward the engines on the left side. I could barely see the left inboard engine, about fifteen feet from where I was sitting.

"Pilot from Mickey. I see what looks like three planes on the scope. They appear to be to our left and are gaining on us. They must be 29s. They're about our altitude, maybe a little higher. I'll watch 'em, over."

The smoke became dense, the fumes almost overpowering. I got some satisfaction out of realizing that what I smelled burning was Japan. The heat began to grow uncomfortable and our plane was being buffeted around violently by the convection currents caused by the extreme heat. Had the pilot not had his safety belt fastened tightly he could not have controlled the plane. I grabbed for the arms of the pilot's and co-pilot's seats and braced myself firmly. I was thrown back and forth as though I were a cork in a child's bathtub. I began to fear that I might be thrown against either the pilot or co-pilot or one of the control columns. I lay down on the flight deck and hooked my feet in

behind some metal panels. With my hands I held tightly onto the legs of the pilot's and co-pilot's seats.

"Pilot from Mickey. The three planes have left the scope but there are two more coming up on us from the rear and one from the front. One of them from the rear appears to be getting dangerously close. We could collide with him. Better look out and see if you can see him."

I looked out to the left. I couldn't even see the left inboard engine now. In fact, I could see nothing. I began to sweat.

"The one from the front must be an enemy plane. It wouldn't be a 29 coming from that direction, over."

There was nothing we could do except pray. The pilot pushed the interphone button on the control column. "Mickey from Pilot. When do we drop, over?"

"Pilot from Mickey, in about four or five minutes, over."

There was nothing for us to do but hold tight and continue flying into that inferno. It took all the guts I could muster to lie there, stare into it and know that we were going on. The fact that, in the intense darkness, we might get rammed by a Jap plane or even one of our own planes, didn't help my peace of mind.

Our plane continued to be thrown around violently. I lay tightly on the floor looking over and around the bombardier's head. The metal floor of the plane grew warmer. I was uncomfortably hot. I looked at the pilot. The sweat was pouring off his face; part of it came from his exertion, part from the heat in the cabin. Sounds came as though a thousand trip hammers were beating on the fuselage. The pilot reached over and flipped on the landing lights. Normally they would throw a good direct beam out about five hundred yards. They glowed dully in the dense smoke; I could barely see them.

"Pilot from Mickey, the scope shows what looks to me like a couple of planes above and behind us. Those are the only ones I see on the scope now. Keep a lookout for them."

Apparently the pilot didn't have the nerve to tell him we couldn't see two feet in any direction outside the plane.

The minutes dragged like hours, the seconds like half hours. It seemed an interminable time we had been in the smoke and fumes. I could not see and could hardly breathe. I prayed fervently that we might drop the bombs and get out.

"Bombardier from Mickey. Open the bomb-bay doors, over."

Swiftly, the bombardier flicked the switch that opened the bomb-bay doors. "Mickey from Bombardier, bomb-bay doors coming open, over."

When the lights on the bombardier's instrument panel flickered on, indicating that both bomb-bay doors were open, he reported, "Mickey from Bombardier. Bomb-bay doors open, over."

There was a long pause during which I got a tighter grip with my hands on the seat legs and got my toes locked in behind the panels more tightly.

"Bombardier from Mickey, get ready to drop."

"Roger."

"Ready. 1-2-3-4-5-6, drop."

I felt our Superfort lurch as all the bombs in both bomb bays simultaneously left the plane. The pilot pushed forward on the control column to keep the plane from climbing upward. As much as we wanted to, we were not permitted to turn right immediately after we dropped our bombs. Should we do so we would undoubtedly be rammed by other B-29s coming over the target. Further than that, flak alley lay to our immediate right. Our briefing instructions were to fly on through the target area, then turn right. There was no escape from our tossing around or our inability to breathe. I put my face down on the hot metal floor of the plane and coughed violently. We flew on.

Very gradually our violent shaking-up tapered off, the fumes grew less sickening. Very gradually were we able to see first our inboard engines, then even our outboard ones. Very gradually the red glow left us. The pilot flicked off the landing lights.

I sat up and looked around outside. No flak had bothered us, no Nip planes had made lethal passes at us. None had needed to on this mission. With the fire and smoke, we were our own

worst enemies. Finally, I stood up, yanked off my flak helmet and unbuckled my flak vest. I peered out front and to the right.

To the pilot I said, "You better turn right before long. I'm going back and start navigating again. Don't believe I'll do any serious navigating until we leave the coast. I can get a radar fix on it and start from there."

"O.K., Snyder. Say, what heading were we to fly when we left the target?"

"Turn to 96 degrees. By the way, this crate was the one that was supposed to be slow and use too much gasoline, wasn't it?"

"Yeah. Hell, we sure moved over the target, didn't we?" the pilot asked with a slow grin.

"Yeah. I wonder how the gas is."

"Dunno, lemme ask the flight engineer. Flight Engineer from Pilot, how is the gasoline supply? Over."

"Pilot from Flight Engineer. We had average consumption on the way up. According to my figures this isn't a gas burner. I've got to transfer some in a little while. I'll give the word so there will be no smoking."

"Flight Engineer from Pilot, roger."

I went back to my desk and took a benzedrine tablet. It would be a long, tiresome journey back and I needed to be awake. I picked up my dividers, fingered my computer meditatively and called to the radar man, "Mickey from Navigator, I want to get a fix on the coast. Will you keep the set tuned to best possible reception?"

"Navigator from Mickey. Roger, will do."

He too was tired and unnerved. . . .

Saipan looked good in the early morning light. There were few planes in the landing-traffic pattern when we lowered our wheels and flaps and the pilot set her down. The ground crew came up to meet us as we came down the ladder.

"Say, Captain, you are one of the first three or four crews back in this group. Very rough mission. Many casualties?"

"Pretty rough mission, don't know about the casualties. I

have an idea there are some planes won't be back, though. That target was like all hell had broken loose."

The pilot came up. "Don't let anybody tell you there's anything wrong with this plane. We got all the gas left we should have and she's got plenty of speed. Damn good plane. If you need another crew to flight-test it up to Japan, let us know. We'll take it again."

The crew chief laughed. "I thought she was all right. Glad to hear you say so. She's my baby and I watch over her pretty close."

I was tired, incredibly tired, as we trudged toward the interrogation room.

It was the next day I learned that *Umbriago III—Dat's My Boy* hadn't returned from the mission.

*Umbriago I* had gone to a watery grave, ditched by a crew that had borrowed him for a mission a month or more before. It had taken five-inch shells—and many of them—from a navy destroyer that picked up the crew to send him below. *Umbriago* was not one to give up easily.

*Umbriago II* had suffered a fate worse than death. When an eager-beaver crew had borrowed him for a mission, he had got badly shot up over the target, and on the way back the crew chopped out and threw overboard everything they could in order to lighten the load. Nothing short of a major overhaul job at a depot in the United States could ready him for combat again.

*Umbriago III* came into being. He had been on the Tokyo and Nagoya fire raids, the latter with a crew other than the one assigned to the plane with which I had flown overseas. Then my old crew, with the new squadron navigator, got him back to fly on the Osaka mission. When he turned up missing the following day, one of the pilots in my old squadron moaned, "I told those knuckleheaded bastards up on the flight line that the number three engine was missing. Nothing would do but they would order it out tonight. That was plain murder in my book."

The best facts that we could piece together were that *Um-*

*briago* had taken off in good shape and had flown at five hundred to a thousand feet altitude like the rest. Several crews reported seeing lights from what they thought might have been a B-29 on the ocean two or three hundred miles north of Saipan. They thought they saw a man walking on its wing.

From this, all we could do was theorize that *Umbriago* had had engine trouble at low altitude. Before the crew had had time to open the bomb-bay doors and dump the bombs, the heavy load on two or three engines must have pulled them the five hundred feet or so into the ocean. They had had no time to signal by radio or do anything else. They were gone forever. . . .

I sat on the edge of my bed, mentally numbed. I wondered what had kept me from being in that crew. I had fought to stay in the squadron, to remain on the crew. My successor as squadron navigator was flying with them that night and was lost with them. Had I remained in the squadron, it would certainly and inevitably have been me.

Right then and there I became convinced that I could not control my own destiny; that there was somebody much more powerful than I pulling the strings. There are no atheists in combat!

# 16

## GOD BLESS 'EM ALL

The nurses and Red Cross girls—may God bless them—were probably the finest things that existed on Saipan. We had been on Saipan about two months when I first learned there was such a thing as a white woman there. We had been busy, and the thought of a woman scarcely crossed our minds. Then, suddenly, one day in a conversation in the quonset during an idle moment, it came out.

“Say, y’know there are nurses on this island.”

Incredulously, unbelievingly, the replies came.

“The hell there are.”

“Naw, you’re kiddin’.”

“Well, by God, will wonders never cease.”

But one of the officers, apparently being of a practical turn of mind and having his wits about him more than the rest of us, fashioned the word that most of us had in the backs of our minds but couldn’t articulate.

“WHERE?” he asked casually.

The word dropped like a bombshell. Its directness stunned our informant. For a moment, he stood there speechless, although his lips twitched once or twice. Finally he mouthed the words with what appeared to be great difficulty and with unusual care. “By golly, I forgot to ask the fellow that told me.”

Pensively and with deliberation, his right hand stroked his jaw and he added quickly, “I’ll do it the next time I see him, though.”

We turned our heads away dolefully, as though to erase the

vision from our eyes, and dropped the subject like a hot potato. It probably wasn't true, anyhow, I mused.

Several days later, our informant burst into the quonset shortly before noon. "There ARE nurses on this island. I just saw them with my own eyes and I know how to get up there. Get a jeep and I'll take you up."

Somebody moaned, "I'm not sure I would believe it, if I saw it. I've been too long on this island without seeing a female."

Another wailed, "I could never stand it on an empty stomach. Let's wait till we have dinner. That'll be in a few minutes."

A third ventured, "Snyder, you get a jeep from the motor pool. Check it out on a blank ticket and we'll write our own destination on it."

I just stood there.

But we all went to dinner, even though it was eaten with some apprehension and no gusto.

I acquired the jeep and we took off, loaded to the hubcaps. Although we had vowed to protect this top-secret information with our lives, if necessary, word of our proposed journey had been noised around. On some men we had to pull rank, with others we cajoled and pleaded, with still others we got tough and lashed out with an unequivocal "No." We almost had to beat men off the sides of the jeep as we pulled away.

The journey was spent in awesome silence. We wound down around near the rolling Pacific, then through some steep hilly land with caves pocking its sides and on through clusters of buildings that housed other units on the island. Finally we came out on top of a high knoll. On it were several—eight or ten—large canvas tents and a number of wooden buildings. This, we learned quickly, was a hospital.

"Here is where I saw some of 'em a little while ago," our informant said solemnly and with great dignity.

We looked around wide-eyed, expectantly, but no women were in sight. We drove on and turned to the left on a small road. To our right was a cluster of pyramidal canvas tents on wooden frames. Ropes were stretched between them. My eyes almost

bugged out of their sockets and I damn near fell out of the jeep when I spied dainty, pink, silky-looking panties and white and pink brassieres flapping back and forth merrily in the breeze. Not women, but those things would certainly indicate there were some around.

Momentarily speechless, I punched my crony sitting beside me in the jeep and pointed. His eyes followed my arm. He looked carefully, unbelievingly, like a youngster seeing his first airplane. Then without a word, he turned, tapped one of the men in the back seat on the knee and pointed. I could not see what took place, but presently I heard a sepulchre-like voice say, "Look at that stuff."

There was more dainty feminine lingerie on other rope lines as we drove slowly by the cluster of tents. We continued to gaze thoughtfully. Then someone voiced the profound opinion, "There's women here, all right! I wonder where in th' hell they are?"

I drove over the crest of the knoll and started down on the other side—away from the tents. Suddenly I pulled into a side road, stopped abruptly with a great screeching of brake drums, backed up hurriedly and started back in the direction from which we had come. No one voiced any objection, no one stated any approval, no one said anything.

As I drove back by the tents, the panties and brassieres still flapped merrily in the breeze. Out of one of the tents daintily trudged a woman who weighed in the neighborhood of two hundred pounds. She was clothed in the loose-fitting brown seersucker dress that seemed to be standard for nurses overseas, a pair of low brown shoes, no stockings and some sort of bonnet made of the same seersucker material as the dress. From around the bonnet there hung wisps of dull brown hair. As we drew closer, it became evident that her face matched the rest of her physical appearance.

"By God, she ain't much, is she?" someone ventured in an awesome but disappointed tone.

"Naw, but she's a white woman. Hell, that's something I

thought I would never see on Saipan. What the hell, beggars can't be choosers."

"Yeah," someone else suggested, "maybe she's got a nice personality."

In a moment another feminine figure stood in the doorway of yet another tent. This one was a considerable improvement over the last. She was a dishwater blonde with an angular frame, a freckled, flat, but sharp-framed face, rather swarthy complexion and—praise Allah—a nice, full, bosomy bust that drooped lewdly yet enticingly as she bent forward slightly to feel if some of her lingerie languishing on the rope line had dried. She would have been rated barely passable in the States; on Saipan she was a ravishing beauty!

This was all our constitutions could stand for one day. We determined to leave the scene immediately before our mental stability slipped away. As soon as we left, our voices returned to us and the journey back was a babble of words. We determined to look further into this situation so that, from time to time, we might have about us the pitter-patter of feminine feet, the tinkle of feminine laughter. . . .

# 17

## NAGOYA — AND RETURN

**“All aboard for Iwo Jima, Haha Jima, Chichi Jima, Nagoya and return!”**

It was the co-pilot standing at the bottom of the ladder trying to get everyone in the plane. As I crawled up the ladder, I replied grinning, “The most important part of that itinerary is the ‘and return.’” We all climbed on board, the bombardier last, merrily chanting, “The flight engineers are a bunch of queers.” The flight engineer chuckled good-naturedly and started about his work checking instruments on his panel.

This seemed to be a pretty good crew to go with, judging from their attitudes. On this raid we were going into Nagoya at fifteen thousand feet. It was lower than we had ever bombed Japan before in daytime. The target was the Mitsubishi Aircraft Engine Factory. It had been previously bombed and a good portion of it had been knocked out—we were back to finish the job.

I hadn’t ridden with this crew since the States, when we had made a Kansas-to-Dry-Tortugas, two-day round robin. Then they had had a different navigator. I was going along this time officially as an observer, ostensibly to check the navigator and, to the crew, as a hateful sandbagger. As the latter, it was my job to serve the sandwiches and fruit juices, to rub the tail gunner’s back upon return and make myself generally useful while keeping out of the way.

I climbed up on the flight deck awkwardly, pulled my gear aboard and plopped the nose-wheel door shut. I was traveling

light for a change—it was my eighth trip and I had decided to try it without a flak vest and helmet.

We fell in a long line of B-29s and taxied out to the take-off strip. We were the lead plane in the second element. Our lead element was heading the whole show.

The co-pilot was handling the controls on take-off. We thundered down the runway picking up speed rapidly as the pilot doggedly called off the air speed. Suddenly the Superfort seemed to gather itself and sweep heavily from the runway into the air. But the co-pilot had allowed the plane to drift to the left side of the runway during the pre-take-off run. Just as we were safely off the ground and the wheels were coming up, we spied a bulldozer parked off the left side of the runway. Five or six men were perched precariously on its seat, the hood and the wheelguards. Others were standing near it in groups, and still others were leaning against its sides, arms folded, feet set firmly. All were engrossed in watching each B-29 roll down the runway and soar into the air out over the ocean. Their attention was riveted on us after their eyes had left the plane that preceded us. When they saw us heading toward them, a frenzied look of alarm came into their eyes. Their arms went akimbo and their lean bodies hunched over as they scrambled madly to get out of our way. They scattered quickly like a herd of sheep that had suddenly spotted a wolf in their midst.

"Ya damn near got 'em," I shouted, as we roared overhead.

The co-pilot's eyes were busy ahead, but he grinned broadly and replied, "Yeah, they sure thought so, didn't they? I wouldn't have hit 'em. We were bound to clear that bulldozer with plenty to spare."

We headed out over the rolling Pacific to our assembly point.

"Careful, there are a lot of 29s circling around here," the pilot shouted, craning his neck across the flight deck.

"Roger. Our right-wing man is with us. Is our left one over there?" the co-pilot queried, wrestling with the controls and leaning over to look out to his right.

"Not yet, but keep circling and I'll keep a watch out for him," the pilot replied.

I stood up behind the pilot to watch out his window for our left wing man. Slowly he hove into sight and began to jockey the B-29 carefully into place near us.

I turned back to the co-pilot. "Looks like we're set to head for Japan."

"Roger."

We straightened out, carefully threading our way through the roaring groups of other Superforts trying to form up in flights. They reminded me of a flock of wild geese momentarily lost in a gathering storm, circling to let the stragglers catch up before they flew on. Our stragglers had found us and we now knew our way. We were ready to be gone.

We began to spread out a little and settle down for the long trip to Japan. We were flying the first part at a relatively low altitude to conserve gasoline and stay below low-hanging clouds.

The bombardier got up to go back and pull the pins on the bombs, so I moved up to his seat to read drift with the bombsight. There were few whitecaps, the ocean was almost glassy. I finally picked up a few whitecaps, however, and got what I believed to be a fairly good drift reading. I straightened up and leaned back in the short-backed, hard-bottomed bombardier's seat. Sticking my feet up on the metal crosspiece of the nose, I let my head fall back and dozed off.

I awakened quickly when the plane hit rough air. I glanced down at the ocean and saw that it had become rough with plenty of whitecaps popping up. I again bent over the bombsight. This time it was easy to read drift. I glanced at my watch and saw that it had been five hours since breakfast; for me that was time for a sandwich and a drink of fruit juice. With that in mind, I went back beside the engineer where the box with the food was. I discovered, much to my amazement, that we had canned chicken sandwiches, jelly sandwiches and orange juice. Happily, I settled for the chicken sandwich, opened the can of fruit juice and satiated my hunger.

About four hours out, the co-pilot noticed that the right-wing ship of the lead element was signaling us with an Aldis lamp. I called for the radio operator to come up on the flight deck with his Aldis lamp.

Questioningly, he hurried up with his Aldis lamp stuck in the crook of his arm. He dropped on one knee and I took my pencil and a piece of scratch paper, copying down the letters as he called them from the blinking lamp in our wing plane.

“G-I-V-E U-S P-O-S-I-T-I-O-N R-E-P-O-R-T.”

“Give us position report,” he repeated to me.

This was an unusual procedure. It is they who would normally be giving us a position report instead of asking us to give them one. Puzzled, I asked the radio man, “Are ya certain that is what the signal said?”

The radio operator was the only crewman sufficiently proficient in Morse code to send and receive by Aldis lamp.

“I’m pretty certain, sir,” he replied. “I’ll signal ‘em to send the message again if you think it’s wise.”

“Why don’t you do that? It sure is a funny request. I can’t understand it.”

Slowly the radio man blinked out, “R-E-P-E-A-T M-E-S-S-A-G-E.”

There was a long pause. We waited anxiously, wondering what their difficulty was. Finally the lamp from the other plane began to blink.

“Here they go again, sir. Will you take this down?”

He repeated each letter to me carefully, pausing between each signal to make certain I had it down.

“G-I-V-E U-S P-O-S-I-T-I-O-N R-E-P-O-R-T.”

“That’s the message, sir,” the radio man said with finality.

I called back to the navigator, “Will you give me a position report. Our left wing just signalled us that they wanted one. I don’t know why.”

Hurriedly and without too much accuracy, the navigator figured out where he thought we were and handed me a slip of paper with the coordinates on it. I hustled forward and called off the position to the radio man, who blinked it off out the left

plexiglass window to our wing plane. There was a long pause while we waited, puzzling over the fact that they weren't signalling us that they had received the signal.

Suddenly the blinking started again and the radio man watched intently. "Take this down, sir. They must be having some trouble."

I wrote as he repeated to me, "R-E-P-E-A-T M-E-S-S-A-G-E."

"I'll do it over for 'em," the radio man said with a faint tinge of disgust. Again, he slowly and carefully blinked out the message containing the coordinates. Then we waited again for the signal that our wing ship had received the message.

The wing ship began blinking again, and I stood expectantly with pencil in hand as our radio man called off the letters to me.

"R-E-P-E-A-T M-E-S-S-A-G-E U-S-E F-I-L-T-E-R."

With the air of a martyr, the radio man secured a red filter. He put it on the lens of the lamp and wearily signalled the coordinates to the wing ship as I read them off to him. We waited several minutes for an all-clear-received signal from them, but none was forthcoming. We were considerably concerned about them now. We felt that they might be in trouble and might go into the ocean; that they wanted to check our position against the one their navigator had so that they could send out an emergency distress signal and have a chance of being picked up by a destroyer.

In vain we awaited an acknowledgment from them. Reluctantly, we were forced to return to our own work, as the navigator called out, "I'm gonna shoot some sunlines. We're due to start our first climb in six minutes."

We hoped that our left-wing ship would stay with us. We felt helpless to do more for them. Suddenly, our engines began a full-throated roar that broke the routine throb we had been feeling and hearing for the past several hours. We had begun our first climb.

The flight engineer called to me, "According to my flight plan we started to climb an hour and thirty-nine minutes too soon."

This called for some quick checking so I went back to the navigator to see where he had had us when we began to climb. His computations showed that we had started climbing about seventeen minutes too soon. Not too good, but it was better than climbing too late; if you're going to err, err on the "too-soon" side. If you waited until too late to climb, you might find that you would hit the coast of Japan still trying to reach your prescribed bombing altitude. This would be disastrous because you would be much more vulnerable to fighter attacks and flak. You would probably wind up bombing at an altitude several thousand feet too low. All the complicated data you had set into your bombsight would be wrong and your bombs almost inevitably would miss the target by a wide margin.

We leveled out at our altitude and flew along in good route formation. Our left-wing ship remained with us throughout the climb and leveled off alongside us. We began to feel a little easier and more secure about them. We reasoned that if they had had some trouble, as we speculated, they would have dropped back in the climb.

Presently we began to climb to our assigned bombing altitude. We had climbed only five or six minutes when we went into a solid bank of clouds. We could see nothing outside the plane.

"By golly, I sure hope that all the planes in our formation fly on the same headings they were on when they went into this stuff. If they don't, some of us could have a nasty collision."

"Yeah," the pilot replied discouragingly, "and they better maintain their prescribed airspeed and rate of climb or some of us might tangle."

When we broke out of the clouds, I looked around in all directions to see where our wing planes and other elements were. There was no one in sight. I began to have faint visions of going over the target alone and commenced to sweat a little more.

Finally, two planes appeared off to our right a quarter of a mile, then gradually two more. In groups of twos and fours they all began to pop out of the clouds like Mexican jumping beans

out of a kettle of popcorn. Somehow, we had climbed a little faster than they had. The pilot throttled back and jockeyed us into our position in the formation.

"What's your ETA for the coast?" I shouted aft to the navigator.

Unaccountably, I sensed that the whole crew had begun to tense up. It was uncanny, it was spontaneous, and it was unspoken.

In a few minutes the bombardier who was sitting out in the nose in the bombardier's seat shouted, "There's land!"

That was my cue. I got out my oxygen mask and attached it to one of the oxygen bottles. Taking the bottle and mask with me, I went forward. I determined that I was going to sit on the back of the bombardier's seat, my feet and legs on each side of him. It wasn't the most comfortable place in the world to sit, but I thought it was the best spot to see what was going on. I had an insatiable curiosity—almost an obsession—to know what was happening. I suppose I was like the moth that was drawn inevitably in toward the flame of the candle until he was consumed by it. If so, I couldn't help it. I had to see the show that General Leemy's Circus was putting on.

I crawled cumbersomely on my "seat," placing the oxygen bottle beside me.

We made our landfall within four minutes of the time the navigator said we would. I looked down at the coast and said to the bombardier, "That country is so mountainous even a goat couldn't live there."

His reply was to the point. "If I were a goat I sure as hell wouldn't want to!"

We flew on tensely, the bombardier and I both eagerly and carefully scanning the sky for fighters and flak. Suddenly he tapped me on the knee and silently pointed off our left wing tip. There at our level, out about two hundred yards, were long white trails of phosphorus flak—the kind that exploded and burned with intense fiendish heat. I noted the time and approximate location so that I could put it on a map later.

Still in good formation, we turned slowly and in a wide arc, heading for Nagoya. The pilot shoved the throttles forward and fought the controls to tighten up the formation so that each plane could afford the other mutual protection against fighter attacks. Our tenseness increased and sweat began to form on my forehead. The bombardier handed me the toggle switch and pointed, "There's the bomb-bay door switch. Flick it this way to open the doors, and that way to close 'em. Here's the camera starting switch. We have to take pictures of the bomb impact. It's all automatic. Flick this switch, and wher the bombs start droppin' the camera starts takin' pictures. I'm gonna be on the nose gunsight all the time, so you can take care of gettin' the bombs away."

I silently nodded and watched the lead plane in the formation ahead to see when the bomb-bay doors were going to come open. The next fifteen or twenty minutes were a jumble of streaking Jap fighters, of thick, heavy black-and-white flak bursts, and flashing tracer bullets from the fifty-calibre guns in our formation of Superforts. About the time our bomb-bay doors came open, the furious fighter attacks began. Nip fighters came streaking toward us at our level. They dived boldly from above and they zoomed up at us from below, dropping off when they came within twenty or thirty yards of our bellies. They knifed their way in from our right front and side and from our left front and side—in fact, from every direction but the rear. The twin-engine Nicks and Irvings came in singly, the single-engine Tonys, Tojos and Zekes only occasionally came in singly; mostly they attacked in pairs and even in groups of five or six.

Sweating, I tapped the bombardier on the shoulder, excitedly pointing. "Here come some. You fire at these and I'll watch over in another direction."

He got the planes I pointed out to him solidly in his sights and gave them short, effective bursts. I searched about eagerly, anxiously, and found more fighters coming from another direction. As I was about to call the bombardier's attention to those, the pilot tapped me on the shoulder vigorously and pointed to

still more fighters boring in from yet another quarter. I developed, in the space of five or six minutes, an acute case of Zero twitch!

Quickly I toggled the bombs on the lead plane, flicked the bomb-bay doors closed and stopped the bomb-impact camera. It was a field day for the bombardier, and, strange as it may seem, both he and I were enjoying it immensely. The feeling of elation was an emotional jag of the most potent and vicious sort, but it was self-infectious and self-sustaining.

Suddenly, I spied a Nick streaking directly for the lead ship. It was close and it offered an excellent target. Swiftly I punched the bombardier on the shoulder and shouted, pointing, "Get that one."

We had heard many tales of Jap fighters ramming the lead plane head-on with the certain knowledge that one American bomber would be destroyed and in the hope that others would also be downed in the melee. An almost positive result of the ramming would be a complete disruption of the bombing pattern and, most probably, of bombing accuracy.

My instinctive thought was that this streaking fighter intended to ram the lead ship. I watched, immobilized by horror, utterly fascinated as he zipped toward the lead plane. Almost every gun in the formation that could reach him was trained on him, but still he bore in swiftly. At any moment I half expected the lead plane to break formation and dive down to avoid what seemed to be an inevitable collision. The Nip and the lead plane flew on, neither one wavering. Much quicker than it takes to tell it, the Nip brushed on over the lead plane a scant three feet above the tail! I breathed a deep sigh of relief, trembling all over from the tenseness and excitement.

The fighter attacks slackened for a few moments. Furtively, I stole a glance over our left wing. There were large bursts of heavy, black, fleecy flak. I saw no planes hit, but in an instant radio silence was broken by a plaintive wail on our interphone communication system.

"This is 562. I'm hit—badly. My co-pilot's dead. I can't keep

up with the formation. Slow down, slow down," then shrilly, "for God's sake, slow down."

I turned to look out our left side and behind us. One of the Superforts from the 878th Squadron was falling rapidly behind. It must have been obvious to the Jap fighters that this plane was fair game; but I couldn't keep from wondering if the fact that he broke radio silence while over the target was not another reason he was immediately swarmed by all the Jap fighters in our vicinity.

Two B-29s behind us peeled off our formation and turned back to help the stricken Superfort. That took guts, I thought.

As a matter of pure self-preservation our formation stuck together tightly as we winged on toward the coast. We were well beyond the target area and the fighters were not as aggressive as formerly. They were all occupied trying to kill the cripple.

The co-pilot, who handled the controls over a good part of the target area, shouted, "I think we were hit in the tail because it shook to beat hell a few minutes ago."

As we neared the coast, I raised up off my seat, stretching my neck to determine the point where we were going to leave the coast. Directly ahead of us lay Hamamatsu.

"That's Hamamatsu, we're liable to get some more flak," I remarked to no one in particular.

"We probably will," the bombardier replied laconically.

As we flew out to sea over the city, it began.

"My God, look at that stuff! Look out to the right—and to the left—and in front of us. What a mess of flak! That Hamamatsu must be one big battery of flak guns."

"Yeah," the bombardier replied, "when we're down this low they gauge their range pretty damn accurately. They're just a little ahead of us or we'd all be knocked down."

As we headed out to sea I glanced at my watch. We had been over Japan forty-nine minutes.

One Jap plane—a twin-engine job of some sort—followed along out of range and about a thousand feet below us, so the forma-

tion kept close together. Every so often the bombardier gave it a few bursts, just to make certain that the Nip knew we weren't forgetting him.

The navigator called a heading to the pilot. "I'm aimin' for a point between the Bonin Islands and the Volcanoes (the Iwo Jima group). I think we can take advantage of the winds we got today and I'll be able to pick up a good check point."

The pilot turned around and nodded amicably to him, and the navigator started to work. We began a very slow descent.

Slowly the tenseness wore off and gave way to fatigue. I remembered that because of Jap air raids on Saipan and two missions flown in the last three days, I had had only about four hours' sleep in the last thirty-six. Reluctantly, I reached over to the navigator's table and picked up the box of benzedrine tablets. I took two and gulped them down with a mouthful of water. . . .

An hour and a half later the navigator called, "There's Haha Jima off to our left."

I left the flight deck where I was perched comfortably and went to the navigator's window to have a look. The island was about thirty miles to our left and rose out of the ocean like a brown, craggy peak. The horizon hung over it like a blue mantle draped over a cane-backed chair. From a navigational standpoint, it told me that we were on course. That enhanced its beauty immeasurably.

The flight engineer said we had sufficient gasoline, our motors were humming along merrily, we were at peace with the world. It was in sharp contrast to the action and chaos over Japan.

I moved slowly and wearily back to the flight deck.

The pilot wanted to know how much gas was left.

"How much gasoline do we have left?" I asked hopefully. "The pilot wants to know."

"I don't know exactly. I'm figuring it out now but we're pretty well on the safe side."

Then the pilot asked, "Is the navigator coming along O.K.?"

This I knew without asking, and I replied, "Yeah, he's doin' fine. We'll be into Saipan in forty-five minutes."

"Good," chirped the co-pilot, "the sooner we can get the interrogation over and get in the sack, the better I'll like it."

"You can say amen to that, buddy," I added.

I watched the blinking, eerie lights of Saipan come faintly into view as we roared on at fifteen-hundred-feet altitude. Skillfully the pilot crowded us into the traffic pattern. The other Superforts didn't seem to be low on gasoline. There was no desperation flying in the traffic pattern as there was after the first Tokyo mission. I was deeply grateful for that.

Routinely, we came in for our landing when our time came. Our wheels touched the ground fifteen hours and five minutes after we had taken off and about twenty hours after we had rolled out of bed. We wouldn't get in bed for two more hours.

But I had another mission behind me and we were home safely!

# 18

## AIR COMBAT'S NO ROMANCE

I slunk low in my seat as I listened to the group commander take the hide off a group of sixty of us. He had called the navigator, bombardier, pilot and co-pilot of each crew on the most recent Kobe mission together, with a bona-fide display of great anger.

We sat in the shady end of the small quonset that housed one part of group headquarters. On a big piece of plywood facing us was a large-scale map. A straight red streamer extended, with only a relatively slight bend or two, from Saipan to the coast of Japan near Kobe. From the coast there were smaller red streamers, about ten or fifteen in all, extending in almost every direction and terminating in various nondescript spots near the coast. Only two out of all the streamers ended up spotted at Kobe.

The group operations officer stood nervously on the right side of the map, puffing rapidly but deeply on a cigarette, his eyes trained on a spot on the thin plywood floor. The group commander, sobered, defiantly angry and grim, supported himself boldly erect at the left side of the map, a long wooden pointer clenched tightly in both hands. The wrinkles in the palms of each hand bore mute evidence of the force with which he grasped the pointer. The blood vessels in his temples were distended and purple and his jaws twitched in nervous wrath before he began to speak heavily and with determination.

"I got you men together because you're the crews that went on this Kobe mission day before yesterday. Here is the map that the group navigator prepared from the logs of each navigator. It

shows that you all followed about the same track until you got to Japan."

He slowed down in his speech and emphasized each word by punching viciously at the map with the wooden pointer.

"I wanna know right now—none of you gets out of this room until he tells me—why only two planes out of all this group sent up there ever reached the primary target. The rest of you either hit the secondary target or targets of opportunity."

His voice crescendoed into a roar as he pounded the butt of the pointer on the frail plywood floor.

"Why—WHY? Why is it you people can't get over the target?"

I stole a quick glance to see if anybody was going to offer his reasons. But no one uttered a sound and scarcely a head turned or a face changed expression.

"C'mon, I wanna know. Now's the time to get this outa your systems."

The silence was deafening. I doubt if the colonel, down deep in his heart, even expected answers. He had been flying long enough to know those were things left unanswered. Those were secrets that would be locked forever in the breasts of the crew members of each plane. Those were what civilians call "trade secrets."

But the group C.O. was not to be deterred in his scathing search. He called out one of the pilots by name. "Adams, why didn't you bomb Kobe?"

"Well, sir, Colonel," Adams (not his correct name) began in an apologetic, querulous voice, eyes glued on the toe of his shoe as it slowly made a line on the floor of the quonset, "that target was completely socked in and our rader set wasn't workin' so hot. I thought we'd better take a visual target."

Silently I believed that the explanation he gave was his rationalization of why he didn't bomb Kobe. Down deep I thought that there must be another reason. But I believed that no mortal would ever find it out. The colonel stood there tight-lipped, gazing intently into space. I didn't believe he was convinced of the validity of Adams' reasons either. He doggedly turned to another

pilot and roughly queried him. "Robbins, you wound up way over here," pointing on the map to a spot a hundred miles east down the coast from Kobe. "Now I wanna know exactly why you didn't hit the primary."

Robbins (not his correct name), with head held high, glistening beads of perspiration on his cheeks, his Adam's apple bobbing up and down like a cork in a washing machine, gave a direct, firm answer in sharp contrast to the previous one by Adams. "Sir, we couldn't find the target. After we wandered around for a while we flew east down the coast until we spied this little town and the bombardier dropped visually."

It sounded convincing, but I somehow gathered from his general demeanor that, had it been a beautiful blonde in a luxurious cocktail lounge he had been searching for instead of the flak-battery-studded Japanese city of Kobe, he would have been eminently more successful.

The group C.O. looked slightly better satisfied, but the lines of grim determination still ringed his mouth the way an impregnable curtain of secrecy rings the Soviet empire.

Some foolish chap, emboldened by the apparent success of his confreres, and seemingly intending to beat the colonel to the draw, broke in soothingly, "Colonel, Adams was right about the target. It was socked in solid at our altitude."

Bearing the sharp end of the pointer against the plywood holding the map, the colonel viciously snapped, "O.K., O.K., but why is it that four of ya didn't get your bombs on anything that amounted to anything? Ya might as well have left them here or thrown them out in the rice paddies."

Instinctively, sixteen men, representing the four crews referred to, slunk lower in their rickety chairs. But I realized that the colonel was fighting a losing battle. He probably wanted to throw the fear of God into us so that on our subsequent missions we would strive harder to reach the target and get our bombs on it—unless the more realistic and impending fear of death or capture gained the upper hand. And, I reasoned, it was largely a matter of the degree of striving.

By dint of supreme effort we could reach the target and drop our bombs on it. But to strive supremely often meant that you faced death or destruction imminently! Was it the basic instinct of self-preservation cropping up? Was it necessary for those in command to override that instinct and relegate it to the background by weighing the hope of freedom, glory, medals, rotation back to the States, the importance of a sense of doing something well and of living with a clear conscience and having yourself well regarded by your friends and acquaintances against the threat of personal ridicule, shame, and the censure and grief that failure and cowardice would bring on your family and loved ones?

Those, I think, were among the chief things that kept men flying and striving conscientiously to reach the target and trying desperately to get their bombs on it. But the trade secrets—the whys and wherefores of failure—will remain locked forever in the minds of those men who participated in those failures.

My reasons for failure on that Kobe mission will never be wrenched from me. In fact, I can truthfully say that I have forgotten them, that I don't remember—and I know that I have more peace of mind because of it. And the queer motivations and the tortured thinking which led men to commit what we think of as acts of cowardice will never be known, I don't believe, even to those men who committed them. What they know and what we see is only the end result of their twisted reasoning, the product of their macabre logic. Those end results and those products are fascinating facets of human life, even though we mortals are utterly unable to fathom the motivations that brought them about.

One of the chaps who sat with me that day in the quonset was a dark-complexioned, smooth-skinned, curly-haired, handsome pilot who had gone on the mission but, like the rest of us, had failed to reach the target. I watched him sit there earnestly listening, with now and then a trace of a pained expression framing his well-chiseled features. Occasionally, he would drop his head momentarily and nervously finger a large signet ring

which he wore on the third finger of his left hand. I recall thinking how much he seemed to have to live for, how pleasant a visual impression he created, and how far I thought he would go in life. But in the vernacular of the streets, he turned yellow. To my way of thinking, he had some quirk of nature that prevented him from flying in combat.

We flew on another mission five days later. It was this chap's third mission. He was on a replacement crew which had been brought over to take the place of a crew shot down.

We were flying at an altitude of nine hundred feet, skimming along close to the water in the early miles of the mission to save gasoline. We were in waters that could well have held some Jap vessels but in which we had never experienced any difficulty of that sort before. We were getting close to the place where we began our climb to a higher—and safer—altitude.

Without anxiety, we entered a low-hanging cloud bank which shut out our view in every direction. We were in the cloud only three or four minutes when we broke out into the bright, glistening sunlight again. Immediately in front of and below us there lay a small Japanese gunboat wallowing in the ocean. Its crew was as surprised as we were. The gunners of the planes in our loose-knit formation were not in position and their gunsights and gun mechanisms were not turned on and warmed up. We were caught red-handed—with our pants down!

We could do nothing but fly doggedly on and hope for the best. We were not prepared to do more. Furiously, the Jap gunboat began to fire at our formation. The puffs of smoke broke around us and the muzzles of the guns below spat red-and-blue flames and belched thick black smoke. The flak sang around us while we cussed and prayed and sweated.

In two minutes we were out of effective range of the guns. No one was hurt, although we were considerably unnerved by the incident.

The handsome chap flew on with us fifteen or twenty minutes,

then slowly pulled out of the formation and returned to Saipan. Later, after the mission, the reason he gave was engine trouble, but the crew chief could find nothing wrong with any of the engines.

He never flew another combat mission. This was in the early stages of the air war against Japan and before the problem known as "refusing to fly" became a noticeable one. He was rotated, unobtrusively and with no fuss, back to the United States.

I recalled vividly the Texan down in one of the squadrons of my group who was a pilot but who had been assigned to an instructor's job in the 73rd Wing Lead Crew School. His had been a more harrowing experience. On two different occasions, this pilot had come back to Saipan with his braking system shot out and his plane riddled with flak holes. Fortunately, no one had been hurt seriously over the target, but he faced a very real and pressing problem of how to get his Superfort stopped once he got it safely on the ground.

Of course, he could make a belly landing, but the success of a belly landing was extremely doubtful and it often tore up the plane badly and sometimes injured the crew members unnecessarily. Further than that, few pilots liked to make a belly landing when a wheels-down landing was possible. He chose, the first time he came back with no brakes, to make a wheels-down landing.

Worried, he called the Saipan tower, "Buttercup, this is 26829, turning into the traffic pattern with no brakes and other damage to plane undetermined. Nobody wounded, over."

To the men on duty on the Saipan tower, this was nothing new. "26829, this is Buttercup. Will have crash wagon and ambulance waiting on runway for you. Give me a call when you are on base leg and wheels down, over."

"26829. Roger, Buttercup. Will do."

Slowly he came in over the rolling swells of the Pacific, touching his wheels down cautiously, easily, as near the end of the

runway as possible. The plane rolled like a giant truck on the downgrade of a steep hill; it seemed to have an animal-like knowledge of the fact that it could not be stopped except by external forces and it gloried in its new-found freedom. It traveled swiftly down the landing strip, a free body full of vigorous energy.

Plunging and rearing, the wild Superfort crashed to a sudden halt with a broken nose wheel, major damage to the other landing gear and minor damage to the rest of the airplane. The crew was tossed about against sharp, hard metal like tenpins in a bowling alley. All of them sustained injuries of one sort or another and of varying degrees of seriousness. The pilot was cut about the head and face and suffered severe nervous shock.

So badly were planes and crews needed to fly missions at that time, that the pilot and crew were back in another plane in eight days flying another combat mission to Japan. Strange as truth sometimes is, this same crew, in a flak-filled mission to Nagoya, again had the braking system of its Superfort shot out. This time, in addition, a part of the tail section was shot away and the plexiglass nose was left with a gaping hole through which the wind whistled and blew in cyclonic gusts on the trip homeward. Three crew members were seriously wounded. In the sombre darkness of a faint, moonlit Saipan the crippled B-29 circled slowly while the Saipan control tower made preparations for another certain crash landing and sent the "meat wagon" down to pick up the wounded.

Ponderously the plane lumbered in for a landing. This time all hell broke loose. Not having dissipated enough flying speed before landing, and having overshot the end of the runway by several thousand feet, the unnerved pilot strove mightily to get the Superfort slowed down before he hit a deep coral ditch which ringed the landing strip. But he had no brakes. Swiftly the plane plunged through the coral ditch, smashing the nose wheel, and careened and crashed into a parked B-29 belonging to another group. The havoc wrought was costly in terms of dollars,

but the dollar price was cheap compared to the damage suffered by the men. Those men, already wounded, were injured more severely by the beating they took; one had his face mashed against a bulkhead so that it was a mass of blood and gristle, another was knocked unconscious and a third suffered a compound fracture of his right leg.

The pilot had old cuts about his head and face reopened and new deep gashes slashed in other places in his upper body. His right arm was broken in two places, and he suffered excruciating pain and shock.

Weeks later when he was released from the hospital and returned to full duty, he frankly and openly told the flight surgeon that he didn't want to fly combat any more, that he had had enough.

But his experience, perhaps, left not so many deep-rooted marks psychologically as that of a navigator who wouldn't face combat flying even before it began for him.

Prior to the time the first Tokyo mission was run, early crews were flying practice missions on Iwo Jima. Credit for combat sorties was not given crews of B-29s although B-24s of the Seventh Air Force were flying almost daily bombing missions on Iwo Jima and each mission was credited to them as a combat mission flown.

No one will ever know definitely and certainly what caused the B-29 this navigator was flying in to ditch in the Pacific Ocean. With only sketchy and hasty warning and inadequate preparation, and while he was still sitting at his navigator's desk attempting to gather together navigational equipment for use when the crew abandoned the plane for liferafts, the Superfort struck the ocean with a smacking crash that rent the stillness of the air. It immediately submerged and the water tore in swiftly through every opening. The entire crew was trapped. The navigator, with unreasoning fear gripping him, fought his way around the bulky four-gun turret to the astro-dome. He ripped and slugged at the plexiglass covering while his lungs burst for

air and his whole body screamed for oxygen. With a crazed, fanatical vigorousness born of terror, he wrenched out the astro-dome already loosened by the rush of water. Shooting to the surface like an overinflated diving suit, he gasped huge gulps of life-giving air. He quickly pulled the lever which inflated his life vest. As his head was periodically ducked under water by the rough, rolling swells and he swallowed mouthfuls of briny salt water, he spied in the distance the other survivor of the crew. Miraculously, it was the tail gunner who had managed, somehow, to open the escape hatch at his gun position and spring through to freedom. Those two men represented the only living members of what seconds before had been a crew of eleven young Americans.

For hour after harrowing hour they paddled steadily with their hands and feet, trying to keep their heads from being ducked each time a gigantic wave rolled over them. They were only partly successful. Finally, after an interminable period, they were picked up by a rescuing Navy PBY.

But the navigator never flew in combat.

A major was a flight leader in the squadron of a happy-go-lucky, devil-may-care combat-wacky lieutenant colonel known as Pappy Haynes. On the first two missions flown to Tokyo, this major had trouble reaching the target, to put it mildly. His navigator and the rest of the crew complained loud and long and bitterly of his inability to handle the situation when they got to the point where thick flak was coming up and fighters boring in.

Pappy's reply to the navigator's entreaties was typically Pappy-like: "Aw, dammit, I'll fly the next mission with 'im myself."

And he did.

The major flew as co-pilot and Pappy flew in the pilot's seat. With Pappy's help, he handled the controls when the plane was in the target area. Everything went along smoothly, and when the target area was behind them Pappy turned happily to the

major and confidently said, "Now, y'see, that wasn't so bad, was it?"

The co-pilot said nothing. He was busily engaged in setting the throttles, adjusting the manifold pressure and decreasing the prop pitch. He was strangely silent throughout the seven-hour journey home.

When the shiny Superfort's wheels were safely on the ground and the big, tired plane had been parked for the night, Pappy clapped his hands merrily on his legs and, with a wide grin, asked, "Now, Major, ya ready to go on the next one by yourself?"

Softly, with an apologetic air, but with clear certainty, the major replied, "Pappy, to be honest with you, I don't wanna fly any more missions!"

It took Colonel Haynes several days to recover from such a frank statement uttered in a desultory, offhand manner.

But this was in the early stages of the air offensive and the major was eventually transferred to an administrative position at Wing Headquarters where he sat out the rest of the war flying a desk.

Probably the most macabre reaction to combat was that of a silent, moody captain who was a pilot in a squadron of the 499th Group. I knew him as a man who got drunk frequently, as a man who would oftentimes stand for periods as long as fifteen or twenty minutes in a crowd that was talking exuberantly, and stare open-eyed, moodily, at the group. When he spoke it was in slow, measured tones and in a hollow, sepulchre-like voice. But despite his idiosyncrasies in this respect, he was a man who seemingly had the respect of his fellow men.

Earlier in the war, he had been one of the first to fly a P-40 fighter off the deck of an aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean and land on an airfield in North Africa. Later he had transferred to bombers and wound up, through the unpredictable vagaries of a wartime air force, as an airplane commander of a B-29. During overseas training back in the States, he had exhibited considerable skill and prowess and sufficient ability and level-headedness

to be made a flight leader. His P-40 experience gave him more than a little prestige among us. Nowhere in his actions was there any indication of potential combat instability.

All the missions that he and his crew flew were flown, to all outward appearances, properly and with no serious trouble.

Then one day two gunners hurried nervously into the office of the squadron commander, pulled off their green fatigue hats, saluted smartly and one began, "Col'nel, we probably shouldn't tell ya this. But we got to. It's gettin' on our nerves. We gotta talk to somebody about it."

"Shoot," the colonel replied.

"Well, sir, Col'nel, it's like this. We've flown on nine missions now with the Captain. Ya know we just finished these first three fire raids on Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka the last four days. We're scheduled to go out on this next one tonight, and that's the reason we came to talk to you. We been gettin' along pretty well up until these last two missions. On the first fire raid on Tokyo we went over the target O.K.—it was hell, too—but we made it. I thought the Cap'n acted a little funny and wasn't quite as steady as he shoulda been. But we didn't think too much about it, did we?" He asked this last of his companion who had been sitting silently, listening.

"Naw, we thought maybe it was just an off night," the other gunner added matter-of-factly.

"But the next night at Nagoya," the first gunner continued, "we were flyin' along pretty as ya please, thinkin' about goin' over the target and wonderin' if it would be as bad as Tokyo, when the Cap'n calls over the interphone, 'Crew from Pilot, there's Nagoya up there. She's burnin' good. Flames are comin' almost as high as we are. Do you see it? Over.'

"We all looked out ahead and Nagoya was sure burnin' all right. I dunno whether you were on that one or not but there was plenty of fire and lots of heavy black smoke. It looked bad. One by one I heard 'em all check in and tell 'im that they saw it and it looked rough. You know how a bunch of guys'd do. Then there was a long silence and finally I heard a voice say, 'Crew

from Pilot, what do you say if we don't go in there? Just turn around and go back and drop our bombs in the ocean?' Col'nel, I sat there stunned. I thought my earphones had gone nuts. I couldn't believe it. Finally, I heard one fella say slowly and coolly, 'Whatever ya think, Cap'n, you're the boss.' Nobody else said a word over the interphone and finally that voice came over the interphone, 'Crew from Pilot, what do the rest of you think? Is it O.K. with you?' There was a long silence then. And finally somebody quietly and disgustedly said, 'Yeah, it's O.K. with me, Cap'n.' About three or four others said the same. I'll be honest with ya, Col'nel, so did I. There wasn't anything else to do, anyway, so I just did it. I dunno whether Tom here did it or not.' He nodded toward the other gunner sitting across the room.

"Yes, sir, Col'nel. I did it. But I'm ashamed of myself. That's why I'm up here now."

The first one continued. "I didn't get much sleep after that mission just thinkin' about what happened. It got on my nerves plenty. But I didn't know what to do about it. Almost before I got unwound from that mission, we got wound up in the Osaka one so I didn't have too much time to think about it.

"Last night we went out on the Osaka mission. We were all kinda lookin' for somethin', maybe we'da been disappointed if it didn't happen. But it did. We was flyin' along in that pitch black and I was sittin' at the waist blister lookin' up at the yellow moon sorta half thinkin' and waitin' to see and hopin' it wouldn't happen. Tom was over at the other blister and I could see him smokin' and the smoke curlin' up in the shadows. This voice came over the interphone again—'Crew from Pilot. Do you see Osaka up there? Over.' I leaned forward as far as I could and looked out the blister ahead. There was fire and smoke up there all right, but there wasn't as much as at Tokyo. 'Bout like Nagoya. I said, 'Roger, Cap'n, I see it. Doesn't look so bad tonight.' I heard the others checkin' in sayin' that they had seen it. Some of 'em would make some remark somethin' like mine and some of 'em just said they had seen it. Then the Cap'n came on the interphone just like Nagoya, only this time he didn't ask us, he told

us. 'Crew from Pilot, I'm going to turn around now. We'll salvo our bombs in the ocean. It's pretty bad up there.' Honest to God, Col'nel, I was knocked out. Tom nor I, neither one said a word. There wasn't anything to say. We didn't make a sound about it the whole way back. And when we got back we just all crawled outa the plane listless-like and dragged our stuff back to our tents."

He paused and took a deep breath and sighed heavily. Then he looked over at Tom, who just sat there rubbing the sweaty palms of his hands against each other, and went on.

"Col'nel, I ain't tryin' to get dramatic on ya and I ain't no dime-store hero, but honest to God I ain't slept a wink today. And neither has Tom. We wanna know what you think we oughta do. Something's gonna happen, I feel it in my bones. We don't wanna get the Cap'n in trouble, but we don't like that business. Only we don't know what to do about it."

The colonel sat for a long time, silently and thoughtfully drawing a straight line on a piece of plain white paper. Then he spoke in measured and considered tones.

"I don't know for sure what to do. I have an idea that maybe it will get straightened out. But we sure can't have that going on."

"We know ya can't, Col'nel. That's the reason we came to talk to ya. The Cap'n's a good guy. We didn't wanna get him in any trouble, but we gotta get ourselves straightened out some way. It's about to drive us nuts. I never had no idea I'd get in this kind of a jam in combat." He shook his head wonderingly.

Slowly, the colonel continued, "Well, can you give him one more chance? Can you fly with him tomorrow night on this fire raid that's scheduled out?"

He hesitated a moment, rolling the pencil back and forth between his hands. Neither of the gunners answered.

"I wish you'd do it for me. Fly this one. I need you to check up on him for me. If he does it on this next raid, I'll take him off combat and we'll see what happens to him then. They're getting tougher on these men who refuse to fly. They're charging them with 'cowardice in the face of the enemy.' That calls for a death

penalty, and I hate to do that to a man till he's had every reasonable opportunity, without jeopardizing the lives of others. How does the rest of the crew feel? Will they fly with him?"

"We haven't talked to anybody else, sir. We come to you first."

"Are you afraid to fly with him? Do you think he might get you all killed?"

Tom spoke up quickly, "Naw, Colonel, we're not afraid to fly with 'im, are we?" He nodded quickly toward the other gunner.

"No, sir, Col'nel, we're not. We'll go ahead and fly with him tomorrow night if you say so," the first gunner added quickly. "But if it happens again, we're liable to blow our tops."

"All right, men, I won't blame you." He arose heavily from his chair and the two gunners did likewise.

"I'll be up at the flight line to see that you get off O.K. tomorrow. Good luck to you!"

The Superfort took off on the fire raid the next night and it was never seen or heard from again.

# 19

## TOKYO AGAIN?

The intelligence officer wound up the briefing, but my thoughts wandered elsewhere momentarily. I heard him say, "You'll pick up your fighters at Kozu Shima, a small island about fifty miles off the coast of Japan. Follow the briefed axis-of-attack to the aiming point, the center of the Mushashina Aircraft Plant on the western outskirts of Tokyo. . . ."

Although this mission was going to Tokyo, it was something new. For the first time we were going to have fighter escort: single-engine P-51 Mustangs. The marines had secured enough of Iwo Jima to allow fighters to land and take off there and were going to reap the benefit of it. We would be over Tokyo at eleven o'clock in the morning at an altitude of 15,500 feet. This was lower than we had ever bombed Tokyo before in broad daylight.

I picked up the thread of the briefing again in time to hear the intelligence officer close: "Are there any questions?"

There was a long pause. The group of men were strangely silent, almost broodingly so.

With a smile and a spontaneous slapping of both hands on the sides of his legs, the intelligence officer said, "O.K., that's all. Good luck and Godspeed."

The crews got up and shuffled out. It was seven o'clock in the evening, Saipan time, and our take-off wasn't until two-thirty in the morning. Thoughtfully, I wandered back to my tent to try and get some sleep.

As I lay on my bed I began to run through the mission in

my mind. Two aerial task forces were hitting the Nakajima Aircraft Plant at Nagoya and simultaneously a third, the one I was in, was going to Tokyo to bomb the Mushashina plant. Our fighter escort, P-51 Mustangs, would be navigated to the rendezvous point, Kozu Shima, by three B-29s out of our task force.

Sleep was difficult. The difficulty was simply the self-same desire to get the unknown behind me. . . .

The thundering roar of the four huge engines reverberated inside the cabin as we rolled along the runway gathering speed for the take-off. The B-29 soared gracefully into the air and out over the rolling Pacific. Relaxing, I moved forward into the waist gunner's compartment. I decided to try to get some sleep in the eight hours it would take us to get to the target. I lay down on the floor with my parachute for a pillow.

When I awakened it was daylight and the hot sunlight was streaming through the right-side gunner's blister on me. I crawled laboriously through the long tunnel connecting the rear and the forward pressurized compartments, dragging my 'chute and Mae West after me. Breaking out of the tunnel into the forward pressurized compartment, I saw the navigator working away with his maps, plotter, computer and dividers.

Curious, I inquired, "Where are we? What's our ETA for the rendezvous point?"

It was a question everyone was continually asking the navigator. "We're about eighty miles south of Kozu Shima. We should be there in about twenty minutes."

Satisfied, I went up on the flight deck between the pilot and co-pilot where the bombardier—a character nicknamed "Flattop" because his head was wider and flatter than the average male head—sat stretching out a little before he climbed back in the bombardier's seat.

"Flattop, when we get over the target I'm going to be right on your back tapping you on the shoulder pointing out fighters," I said jokingly.

"Brother," he replied good-naturedly, "you won't see 'em a

damn bit sooner than I will. I've got 20-20 vision, too, y'know, and I put it to good use."

We flew along silently for awhile. It was a beautiful day with hardly a cloud in the sky, unusual weather for Japan.

"There's Kozu Shima off our left wing," the navigator said.

I looked out to the left. It looked like a little hunk of putty with green moss strewn around over it here and there. We began to circle the island and everyone started putting on his equipment. Parachutes were buckled, Mae Wests snapped on, flak vests brought out and slipped over heads, and oxygen masks and leather helmets pulled on. I left my flak vest off for the time being so that I could be free to move around. We scanned the skies anxiously for other Superforts and our fighter escort. There was no sign of either.

"The fatherland will sure as hell know we're coming today after we circle this place for awhile," I said to no one in particular.

The pilot nodded, and the co-pilot added, "The little bastards will probably be up there in full force, too."

Off to the left, a formation of B-29s came slowly into sight, then another and another. The tail gunner called out over the interphone, "Pilot from Tail Gunner. There's a formation of 29s about ten miles behind us."

He paused a long moment and then added excitedly, "There's the fighters, I think, off to our right, high at three o'clock—yeah, I'm sure that's them. Boy, what a sight! Look at 'em!"

There were about a dozen shiny P-51 Mustangs with their silvery skins glistening in the bright midday Japanese sunlight. They moved slowly across the horizon dutifully following three B-29s like a flock of fledgling birds tagging along behind three huge eagles.

The pilot found our formation and quickly pulled the Superfort up and throttled back slightly, falling into our assigned slot in the rearmost spot of a four-plane formation. Sweating profusely, he strove to keep in close formation. He was not over

five feet tall and he was constantly pulling and pushing on the control column, the throttles and the rudder pedals.

Slowly we crept on toward the coast of Japan. Mount Fujiyama loomed majestically into view. Its dark base and snow-covered top gave it the appearance of a huge cone of chocolate ice cream topped with a rich coating of whipped cream. I had too little time to enjoy its beauty as I slipped on my flak vest hurriedly and got settled uneasily for the bombing run. The bombardier looked like a man from Mars as he sat in the nose encased in his flak suit and flak helmet. It seemed as if we were crawling over Japan as we turned from the I.P. (initial point) on to the bombing run. I realized then that it was going to be a long run, for I was still unable to see Tokyo clearly.

Quickly I glanced up ahead to see formations of B-29s already over the target and into heavy, black, puffy flak. Up above us and to our right and left P-51s were streaking through the sky. The P-51s had contacted Jap fighters and bloody dog-fights were in progress. I searched the sky carefully and apprehensively but I saw no fighters coming our way. My gaze was drawn inevitably and inexplicably back to the flak; it was the heaviest I had ever seen over Japan. I wished to hell I could stop looking at it but it held a strange fascination for me. Tokyo was now just off to our right and I could get a clear view of the entire city. I picked up the binoculars. I could see with crystal-like clarity the twenty-seven square mile burned-out area: there were no complete buildings standing, a few walls here and there, but it was generally leveled as though a great bulldozer had gone plowing through. It had a rather charred, light-brown appearance. I could see angry red flashes all over the city—ack-ack guns firing!

"There goes a 29," the co-pilot shouted.

I looked directly in front of us and saw a B-29, on fire and badly crippled, pass quickly out of view below as it went plummeting to earth. One man bailed out, probably the tail gunner. When he had cleared the plane he pulled the ripcord on his 'chute and it came streaming out above him. Before it had time

to blossom out it burst completely into flames. I rose, unbelieving, horrified, out of my seat and looked down; the figure hurtled out of sight quickly. Sitting down momentarily stunned, I wondered what had kept that from being me. I looked up ahead and saw black bursts of flak that seemed thick enough to walk on. I wished to hell there was some way to get to the target without going through all of it, but I knew there wasn't. We were going to have to wade right in and trust to God to do the rest. I turned the binoculars on it to get a better look at the bursts. Magnified, they looked even worse; my morbid curiosity satisfied and sufficiently frightened as I was, I put the binoculars down.

"The bomb-bay doors are coming open," the pilot yelled, as the doors of the lead plane popped open. The bombardier opened ours and handed the bomb toggle button back, asking, "Who's going to drop the bombs?"

The pilot and co-pilot were busy flying the heavy Superfort and the bombardier was glued to the nose gunsight watching for fighters, so I stood up and took the switch that was hanging by its cord over the bombardier's shoulder. My knees were shaking violently, but I wasn't ashamed. Anyone who says he doesn't get scared in such a situation is either a liar or crazy as hell. I don't claim to be either. It was the first time I had ever had it happen and I felt that it wouldn't have happened then if I had been doing something. But I was standing there seeing the whole show, with nothing to occupy my mind. I watched the lead plane carefully and, when its bombs started coming out, I hit the toggle switch yelling, "Bombs away! Let's close the doors and get the hell out of here fast!"

The bombardier closed the doors swiftly as a report came over the interphone that all the bombs were out. We couldn't turn right to head out to sea and comparative safety yet—if we did we'd go right over the center of Tokyo and Tokyo Bay. It was Tokyo's flak alley. So we continued on our present heading. A song kept racing through my mind and I silently hummed it over and over, unable to get rid of it. I couldn't figure out why, because I didn't even know the name of it. The words went:

I met her on Monday and thought she was grand.  
I saw her on Tuesday and held her hand,  
Wednesday night I met her dad and mother  
And gave a nickel to her freckle-faced brother.

I tried desperately, and for no really cogent reason, to stop the song from running over and over again like a broken phonograph record, but I couldn't. It was as involuntary as my knees shaking a moment before.

We were finally through the worst part of the flak and only sweating out occasional flak bursts and fighters. Tokyo slowly slipped behind us and we were over open country. The plane above and to the right of us couldn't get its rear bomb-bay doors closed. They would go partly closed, then the left one would fall open again. They tried it over and over. A plane off to our left had the left wheel door hanging open. The tail gunner suddenly broke the interphone silence sharply, "Pilot from Tail Gunner. The formation behind us is catching all the flak now. It's still as heavy, over."

"Roger, Tail Gunner," the pilot shot back quickly.  
Silently, I prayed that they would come through as well as we apparently had.

After what seemed an interminable length of time, we turned right and headed for the ocean, about fifty miles away. The Jap fighters began viciously to knife in at us! A twin-engined, snub-nosed Jap plane came streaking through our formation with the anger of a coiled rattlesnake. I could plainly see the big, circular, solid-red insignia—the Rising Sun—on the side of the fuselage. Lethal red flashes shot out from the forward edge of its wing. It was about fifty feet above us, so it wasn't probable that the bullets would hit us. Off to either side two single-engine Tonys came slathering through lazily, tauntingly rolled over on their wing tips and fell off down below in the flash of an eye. I looked off to our right, then, in amazement, tapped the pilot on the shoulder and said, "Look at that 29 over there."

The number-two engine was on fire, flames streaming out behind.

At about that time the co-pilot shouted, "They're going like hell trying to get out to sea. I heard someone tell them over interplane communication to slow down so he could catch up."

They were about ten or fifteen miles off to our right but, calmly and with no show of bravado, the pilot said, "Let's go over there and see if we can give 'em any help."

We peeled off sharply to the right. As we gradually drew closer I could see that the number-two engine was badly afire. The red flames, fanned by the speed and wind, were beginning to lick back along the fuselage to the side gunner's blister. There didn't seem to be a ghost of a chance that the fire would go out.

"Why in the hell don't they bail out?" the pilot asked.

As we tensely watched the flames grow larger and lick more dangerously back along the fuselage, we suddenly realized how utterly helpless to be of any aid we were. I watched the plane, paralyzed with fascination, and saw one figure come hurtling out and disappear in the wink of an eye behind the tail. The gunners in our plane were excitedly yelling into the interphone, "There's two more men coming out. Oh, God, I don't see a parachute open on any one of the three. Oh, my God!"

Seconds later, the entire left wing of the Superfort tore violently loose from the fuselage and went sailing down below out of sight. Then the number-three engine wrenched itself loose from the right wing and streaked by us not a hundred yards away. I began to wonder if we might not get hit by flying parts. Then, slowly and gracefully, the remainder of the big silver eagle rolled over to the left and began to spiral majestically down out of sight.

None of us spoke for almost a minute as we flew on, trying to get away from Japan. Then, finally, I had to break the silence; but I think I did it reverently and softly. I intended to, at least.

"She sure died proudly, didn't she?"

Nobody answered. It wasn't really a question, anyway. It was answered before I had said it.

# 20

## OVER AND OUT

This one I didn't want to ~~fly~~. I was doing it for the record. With grim determination, I gathered my equipment together and hurried over to the operations quonset where a jeep sat parked, the driver lolling comfortably with one foot cocked up on the edge of his seat.

"Can you take me up to the line? I'm going on this mission with a crew out of the 878th Squadron." Quickly consulting a crumpled slip of paper in my hand, I added, "It's plane number 47643, parked along the east edge of the strip."

"O.K., sir. Hop in and I'll take ya up."

I pulled my equipment out of the jeep and laid it on the light, oil-stained coral.

"You can go on back to operations, Driver. Thanks for bringing me up."

"Yes, sir, Captain. Good luck to you."

As he drove off, I looked around at the crew. The co-pilot was a stranger. Desperately trying to conceal my squeamishness, I casually ambled over and stuck out my hand cordially. "How are you? Snyder's my name."

"Morris is mine—Art," (this name is fictitious) he replied nervously; then quickly added, "How do ya feel about this mission?"

"Oh, okay, I guess. How about you?" I tried to sound jaunty.

"Don't know for sure. I'm not superstitious, but I couldn't wear my lucky shoes. Had to buy a new pair." He pointed to a

new pair of heavy G.I. shoes. "Do ya think it will make any difference?"

"Naw," I replied with an air of confidence that I didn't quite feel.

"Well, anyhow, I got my lucky pictures." He pulled from his shirt pocket ten or fifteen snapshots of his wife taken in a grass-skirt-and-brassiere combination.

"I sent her that outfit when I was in Honolulu on my way out. She looks pretty snazzy, don't she?"

Aside from the fact that any picture of a white woman looked snazzy on Saipan, she had a nice figure and a pretty face.

"Yeah," I mused slowly. Grasping at anything to take my mind off the mission, I examined each picture carefully. When I had finished and had handed the pictures back to Morris he asked, pointing to the grass-skirted maiden on the nose of the Superfort, "See that picture up there?" I nodded. "They got an order out now that we have to take all those sexy pictures off the planes. Some brass hat's wife got insulted over them. Silliest thing I ever heard. We'll never take that picture off. Be bad luck now, after we've gone on all these missions with it on there."

To change the subject I quickly broke in, "How many missions have you got in?"

Sticking his hands doggedly in the pockets of his khaki pants, he replied with a nervous shrug of his shoulders and a quick little laugh, "Don't know. Don't even count 'em. Not enough to go home yet. I don't want to remember until I'm ready to go home."

The pilot, through checking the airplane, walked over.

"Art, for heaven's sake, just once get up in that airplane ahead of time and get all your flying equipment out of the aisle so that we won't have to struggle over parachutes, Mae Wests and oxygen masks to get into our seats. Will you do that just once?"

"Okay, okay," Art replied hurriedly, without looking up. He waited until the pilot had walked away and, pulling his shoulders together as though to shut out some distasteful thought, said, "I'll never straighten that stuff out. It's been that way on every mission and it's no time to change it now."

Struggling for any bit of conversation that would pull us over on the brighter side, I asked, nodding in the direction of the pilot, "How does he feel about the mission?"

"Oh, he's crazy." Morris began shaking his head back and forth quickly, like a rat confronted with two passageways in a maze and not knowing which way to turn. "He don't think anything about it. All he wants to do is fly every mission and get home as quick as he can."

I lit a cigarette. Little thoughts were streaking through my mind, trying to figure out a way for me to get off this mission without showing that I just plain didn't want to go. I was beginning to get worried about Morris. A man in his frame of mind could get us all killed.

Walking over to my gear, I picked it up and viciously slung it over my shoulder. Then I trudged defiantly to the ladder leading up to the flight deck and threw my equipment up above so that it landed a little forward of the four-gun turret. I strode back to where Morris was standing, relieved that I had the guts to make the first move toward going on the mission. But I was in no mood to navigate an airplane to Japan.

As a final jangle to my edgy nerves, Morris added, "One thing good, I got on my lucky hat. Worn it on every mission." He pulled a bedraggled, dirty air-force cap off his head and held it out for my inspection.

Grinning sullenly, I replied, "By God, that's the only good thing you've said since we've been talking here." His expression never changed, nor did he give the slightest indication that he had even heard me.

Climbing up the ladder to the flight deck, I felt like a condemned man trudging his last mile. I seated myself at the navigator's desk and went through the pre-take-off check as a matter of habit. I tried to see some humor in the good-luck hat and pictures, but a laugh froze on my lips as the engines started with a full-throated roar. . . .

Eight hours later we drew rapidly closer to Kawasaki, a Jap-

anese city just south of Tokyo. It was burning like a huge funeral pyre, ugly black smoke belching up fiercely, emitting stinking, acrid fumes. Automatically I called, "Mickey from Navigator, set up your bomb-release line, over."

"Roger, Navigator."

We roared on through the flame and smoke still eight miles from the point where we would release our incendiary bombs. Looking out my window I saw far ahead to the left a string of flashes, eerie and gaunt in the black night, sparking the landscape at one- or two-second intervals.

"Navigator from Pilot. Look at that bastard up ahead. It's one of our 29s who hasn't got the guts to come in over the target. He's dropping his bombs out there in the rice paddies. Then he's going home and claim a mission, I suppose."

"Roger, I see him. Those people make me so damn mad I could fight a tiger barefisted." There was a pause, then the pilot anxiously asked, "How long before we drop our bombs?"

Glancing at the radar scope, I answered, "We've got five miles to go yet."

Like the silvery glint of a knife flashing in the pale moonlight, a Jap searchlight caught us in its glare and held on to us, pointing like a white-gloved finger. I sat stark upright. The cabin of the Superfort was as light as day. If a searchlight got on you, accurate flak would inevitably follow. We dived sharply and twisted abruptly to the right and to the left. The searchlight followed us. We zoomed upward, then fell off to the left, the lumbering B-29 flying with all the maneuverability of a fighter plane. We turned and twisted and dived and climbed until I had to fasten my safety belt to keep from being thrown roughly on the floor. But the searchlight fingered us out on every maneuver; we couldn't escape its glare for even a second.

Sweating nervously, I tensed up, hoping desperately to get away from the light's imposing glare. It was like standing alone on a huge, dark stage with the white spotlight trained mercilessly on you. The thought flashed through my mind of seeing Al Jolson sometime, in a movie, blackface make-up on, arms outstretched,

standing in stark loneliness, upturned face limned against a huge, bright spotlight. I felt as if all the Japs in Kawasaki had their eyes focused on our twisting, turning Superfort, and I visualized all the flak batteries slowly but certainly turning their black muzzles toward us, with Japs scurrying behind them, twisting dials and rotating wheels. Viciously I called, "Pilot from Navigator, for heaven's sake keep up that twistin'. Maybe we can get away from that damn searchlight yet."

He didn't reply. I couldn't force myself to look out of my window any longer. But to ease the bursting feeling inside me, I hung my head low and beat my fists on the desk.

Suddenly, as quickly as it had picked us up, the searchlight left. We were again in the eerie light cast by the flames below. Sitting there unnerved and sweaty, I glanced quickly, unbelievably, out the window. Two thousand feet below, silhouetted by the flames, a lone B-29 slanted across our path. Irascible and upset as I was, I thought: that damn hero could well get a load of incendiaries dropped on him by mistake from a Superfort above. Then they'd all be deader than hell and it'd be one of their own planes that killed them.

"Pilot from Tail Gunner, there's a friendly night fighter right above us about a hundred feet."

"Tail Gunner from Pilot, roger. Keep an eye on him."

I silently thanked God for Iwo Jima from which the friendly night fighter had come. We drove on, still almost three miles short of the aiming point. The stress of the past few minutes had worn off, leaving me sitting tensely at the desk, arms stretched forward, palms down on the table. I was waiting impatiently for the passage of time to bring us to the bomb-release point. The Superfort was quiet except for the roaring of the four engines. Suddenly, bristling with strained calmness, the voice of the pilot came over the interphone, "Art, the auto-pilot's all set up. If anything happens to me, just flip the switch."

Instinctively, the cold realization crept over me that the co-pilot was too paralyzed with fear to handle the controls if the pilot were shot up. The co-pilot wasn't fit to fly combat, but he

wanted so desperately to finish his missions and get back to the States that the pilot had let him fly on, taking the chance that he wouldn't be knocked out over the target. The crew was willing to lay their lives on the line, it was easier than making an issue of it. I wasn't a member of the crew and I felt no such obligation. I was risking my neck this one time with them, probably would never fly with them again.

Viciously I punched the interphone button, swiftly glancing at the radar scope. The impetus which gave me courage to say it, and the steely calm of my voice, surprised me tremendously. "Morris, *you son-of-a-bitch*. You fly that airplane if you have to. It's not going on auto-pilot."

I glanced quickly up ahead at the co-pilot's back as he sat hunched over in his seat. As though suddenly gouged in the small of his back with a searing iron, Morris sat bolt upright in his seat and grabbed hurriedly for the control column in front of him.

My mind full of the job of getting the bombs off, I called, "Bombardier from Navigator, have you got the bomb-bay doors open?"

"Navigator from Bombardier, roger."

"Ready . . . 1-2-3-4-5-6, drop!"

Waiting for the upward surge of the Superfort which would indicate that it was free of the bombs, I glanced again at Morris's back. He was sitting straight in his seat with his hands still on the control column as it moved to the right and left, backward and forward, to the beckoning of the pilot who was handling it.

"Bombs away. Bomb-bay doors coming closed," the bombardier called.

We roared on through the searing red flame and billowing black smoke.

"Pilot from left waist. There's a 29 off to our left about a hundred yards. I'll keep a watch out for him, over."

"Pilot from Tail Gunner. There's two night fighters riding on our tail now."

"Roger, Waist and Tail. If that 29 gets any closer, let me know."

I sat back in my seat, sweaty but relieved that we had dropped the bombs. Searchlights fingered the sky, darting in ever widening arcs, but I hoped fervently that they would stay off us. As we turned slowly to the right to head out to sea and safety, one bold white shaft of light crept dangerously close to us, throwing an eerie shadow in the cabin. It moved away slowly as we bent more steeply into the turn. We straightened out on the heading that would carry us out into the broad, welcome Pacific. The night was a symphony of silence broken only by the monotonous roar of the engines and the faint crackling and oppressive heat of the target area we were leaving.

Not a light winked on any place below as we flew on toward the ocean. I looked out my tiny navigator's window to the left below. There was only the faint glint of yellow moonlight on the silvery skin of the Superfort.

"Pilot from Navigator. Turn to one-seven-four degrees. We're on our way home now. I'm heading for Iwo Jima as a check point, over."

"Roger, Navigator, I'll fly one-seven-four," the pilot repeated, checking the heading with me.

"Pilot from Tail Gunner. Those night fighters are leaving us now. They're turning around, heading back for the target area."

Three hours and thirteen minutes later, Iwo Jima loomed ahead ominously in the early morning light. Mount Surabachi stood out like a squat cone. At its toe, dimly outlined, lay a small marine cemetery, the white crosses marking each grave stretched in even, neat rows, their long axis directly under the landing path of the Superforts. The runway was barely visible in the hazy murk, the low, makeshift buildings nothing more than huddled blobs of heavy blackness sprawled hither and yon.

"Navigator from Pilot. I'm going into Iwo. We're low on gasoline. We might be able to make it back to Saipan O.K., but it isn't worth the chance when we got Iwo here."

Our wheels and flaps came down as we soared low over Surabachi and on beyond the marine cemetery. We touched our wheels heavily. There was no jeep to meet us with a large sign painted on its rear, "Follow Me," nor anyone to show us where to park our B-29 to get it refueled. Pulling it over to a convenient place off the runway, the pilot cut the engines quickly. Slowly we began to file down the ladder on to Iwo Jima soil.

"What do you say we see if we can get something to eat here?" I ventured cautiously.

"Yeah, good idea," the pilot replied, "that flight lunch we had this time was murder, wasn't it?"

Finally a jeep drove up and a sergeant dressed in grease-begrimed overalls, his face black from sweat and accumulated dirt, sprang out. "Whatsa matter, sir, some engine trouble?"

"No," the pilot replied, "we need some gasoline. Can you fill it up for us?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but we've got strict orders to just put in enough gasoline to get you back to Saipan."

"O.K., put it in then. Beggars can't be choosers."

"Everything quiet up here now?" I asked out of curiosity.

"Hell, no! We had a hell of a lot of pea-shooter pilots killed last night." He shook his head nervously. "This island is declared secured, but it's a damn sight far from secured yet. Those damn bastards are gonna kill us all if we don't get 'em rounded up somehow."

Machine-gunning on, he rattled, "We got electrified barbed wire strung all around the living area except across the runways. It gives an alarm so we know if anybody's trying to get in. Then we got guards posted twenty-four hours a day walking up and down the edge of the runway to keep the Japs out. There's still plenty of Japs holed up on Surabachi and in caves all over this damn collection of volcanic ash. We send patrols of American soldiers out every day to hunt for Japs. They always kill some; they haven't brought a prisoner back since I been on this forsaken place. Those Japs just won't surrender, by God, they'll die first. They're the damnedest people I ever saw."

"Our patrols come in, marching down the runway every evening along about dusk. The only place they can get back in the living area is right down the runway. Sometimes they come in singing. The guards don't pay much attention to them. When they see them comin' and singin' they just let them on through. It's hard to see them in the dusk anyhow. They know they're our patrols comin' back from a day huntin' Japs.

"Well, last night a bunch of those Jap bastards got all juiced up on sake, put on their best Sunday-go-to-meetin' uniforms with their samurai swords danglin' at their sides and their Jap rifles slung over their shoulders. They were smart, they waited till it got good and murky along about nightfall, then they marched down the runway pretty as you please singin' at the top of their lungs. The guards on the runways didn't even stop them. They thought they were just an American patrol comin' back. Just as soon as the Japs got inside the wire they started yelling 'Banzai!' at the top of their lungs and then scattered in all directions swingin' their swords like wild men and shootin' their guns at any livin' American. It was slaughter. Before we got all those Japs killed, they slaughtered a hell of a slew of our men. It's a mess up here."

Silently we agreed with him; but openly the pilot said, with no conviction, "It's a mess every place. Gas it up for us, will ya?"

The sergeant replied, subdued, "Yes, sir, Lieutenant, I'll have it ready in about twenty minutes."

"Say," I asked, getting back to our original thought, "where's some place to eat around here?"

Pointing off east of the runway, the sergeant replied, "There's a mess shack for transient airmen over there. You'll see it; it's about a hundred-fifty yards due east. It's got a big sign on it. But I'll tell you right now, the only thing you'll get is a piece of Spam between two thick slices of G.I. bread and some lemonade. They ain't got anything else."

He sidled up to me and lowered his voice confidentially, "About two or three hundred yards over to the west of the runway, you'll find the navy officers' mess. They got everything. If

you can get in there to eat, you're O.K. They're wise to these B-29 crews comin' into Iwo though. They've put a colored messboy on the door to check everybody in and out." He looked at me carefully. "I dunno'. With that flyin' suit on you might be able to get in. That's the same kind those navy flyers wear. But even if you can't get in the mess, maybe the cooks'll give you a handout from the kitchen."

This was the most solid piece of information we had received since we got on the island. We headed directly toward the navy officers' mess, almost falling over ourselves in our hurry to see if we could latch onto some fresh eggs and bacon.

Boldly, as though accustomed to doing it every morning of the world, I pushed open the screen door that opened into the navy officers' mess. Just inside the door to the right, standing inscrutable, firm, yet courteous, was a black messboy outfitted in a slate-gray uniform that just about matched the ankle-deep, shifting volcanic ash in which he was standing. Bluffing as much as I felt the situation could stand, I started to push my way on through to a table, with the rest of the crew trooping at my heels. The messboy held out his hands, stopping me, and quickly spread his face with a wide grin. "Pardon me, sir, may I see your identification card? This is a navy mess."

Still bluffing, I blustered, "Whatta ya mean, identification card? We don't need any identification card. We're transients. We just wanna get some breakfast and be on our way."

"Yes, sir. Are you men navy fliers?" he inquired self-effacingly.

"No," I replied, deciding not to stretch the truth too far. "We're off a B-29 that's comin' back from Japan. We stopped for gasoline."

"Yes, sir," he replied, bowing slightly, "your mess is just across the runway on the east side. You can get fed over there, sir."

I backed out unceremoniously. The rest of the crew stumbled in the unsure footing of the shifting ash as they tried to get out of my way.

"Wait a minute, by God," the pilot began heatedly, stuffing

his hands in the pockets of his flying suit. "I'm not going over there and eat cold Spam if we can get fried eggs here. Let's give this a good think."

Morris, for the first time since we landed on the island, spoke up. "Let's try the kitchen. Maybe we can talk the cooks out of some food. We haven't got anything to lose."

Near by was a small screen-enclosed shack with a tiny smoke pipe sticking up in one corner of its black tarpaper roof. We stumbled over to the door and I pushed it open cautiously. There were two colored cooks in once-white uniforms with dirty chef's caps cocked on the sides of their heads. One was bending over a huge pan of sizzling bacon that he had just pulled from the oven of a coal-burning cook stove. The other stood, a spatula in his hand, turning fried eggs on a wide black griddle.

I coughed nervously. "Pardon me, but I was just wondering if we could get an egg and a piece of bacon or two?" I asked in my best tramp-begging-for-a-handout manner.

The cook bending over the bacon straightened up, glancing in our direction at the sound of my voice. He looked annoyed and hesitated a long moment before answering roughly, "Where you men from?"

"We flew some TBFs (navy dive bombers) in, but we forgot our identification cards and they won't let us in the mess," I lied glibly.

"Where'd you come from?" he inquired, his tone of voice indicating skepticism.

"Saipan," I replied, telling the truth for a change.

"How many are there?"

I turned around to start counting when the pilot broke in, "Eleven. We just want something to tide us over till we get back to Saipan. Whatever you can spare us."

"Get over there and get you a couple of pieces of bread and file by the stove here."

Acting quickly to forestall his changing his mind, we hurried over, single-file, to a low wooden table where long loaves

of sliced bread lay. As we filed by the stove the cooks placed two slices of bacon and a fried egg on each of our slices of bread. We thanked them profusely and bowed out the door.

"Let's get back to the plane and see if we can get off," the pilot offered. . . .

Hours later we pulled onto our hardstand on Saipan.

"Lieutenant," the crew chief said to the pilot, "I've been sweatin' you out. I'd sure hate to see this baby go down. Anything serious?"

"No, Sergeant," the pilot replied wearily, "we needed gasoline so we went into Iwo Jima. That's all. Many of the planes back yet?"

"Yes, sir, but quite a few of them are overdue. Pretty rough?" he asked hesitantly.

"A little," the pilot answered. "I'm afraid we lost some last night. Lots of searchlights up there. All over the sky. The most I've ever seen."

I slung my 'chute over my shoulder and walked away from them while they were still talking. I wanted to get the pilot aside for a minute and straighten out my outburst about Morris when we were over the target. I didn't know how to approach it and I didn't know what to expect from him. Gathering my courage, I turned around suddenly, about twenty-five feet from where the pilot and crew chief were standing.

To the pilot I called, "Come here a minute, will you?"

Trailing his 'chute over his shoulder he walked back to where I stood. Without any preliminaries, I began, "I'm sorry as hell about my outburst over the target. I suppose Morris hates my guts."

Quickly—almost too quickly—he said, "That's O.K., Captain, perfectly O.K. He's had it coming a long time. I don't know what his trouble is. Back in the States we had the same sort of trouble with him when he got married. He started coming in for landings with wheels still up. He'd forgot to put them down. Or he would dive on the runway. Had his mind wrapped up in his

gal. It's the same trouble out here. We just haven't the heart to say anything to him. We've been getting along all right, so I've just let him slide by."

"You know," I said thoughtfully, "maybe it was just what he needed, even if it was a little rough on him."

"Yeah, you may be right. I noticed that he sat up and grabbed the wheel when you blasted him."

"Yeah, and he had hold of it all the rest of the time we were over the target area, too. I watched him whenever I could spare a glance. But you know," I went on, grinning, "I think I learned my lesson. After this, whenever I'm flying with a strange crew and one of its members sidles up to me furtively and nervously inquires, 'How do ya feel about this one?' I got a plan mapped out."

A wry grin spread across the pilot's face as he tugged at the belt of his flying suit.

"Yes, sir," I continued, gazing off into space, "I'm going to ask innocently, 'What one?' and then I'm going to pick up my equipment, throw it back in the jeep, climb in carefully and drive away."

## EPILOGUE

In the murky, dull, early morning light the huge hull of the navy Coronado flying boat lay silently rolling in the gentle Pacific swells, water slapping noisily at its sides. A faint light shone through its windows while the steward hustled about inside, readying the seats and checking the equipment. All was serene and tranquil; only the navy personnel charged with the responsibility of getting the passengers safely into the plane were busy and scurrying.

Outside, men stood about in groups, idly smoking cigarettes that glowed faintly in the morning dusk. There was little noise, no strident babble of voices; these men were on their way back to Hawaii or the United States and it was too early to be enthused about the prospects of the trip—or anything else, for that matter. There was, here and here, a yawn, and one or two men vigorously rubbed sleep from their eyes with the backs of their clenched fists. The chilly morning air made them shiver a bit in their flimsy khaki shirts and trousers; tousled hair and unbrushed teeth attested to the fact that the hour was early and preparations had been hurriedly made so that the makers could meet the deadline on take-off.

Suddenly, the gray-clad steward appeared in the squat, oval doorway of the plane, his salt-tarnished navy cap cocked jauntily on the back of his head and his left hand tightly clutching a clipboard. He stood there looking about, one leg bent at the knee, heel hooked over the metal floor flange, steadyng himself easily with his right hand hung on the ceiling flange of the door. He straightened up quickly and stepped briskly down to the wooden dock, holding the clipboard in front of him, flashlight trained on it. Quickly he began calling off names.

“Captain Savage, Joseph M.”

“Here.”

"Captain Snyder, Earl A."

"Here."

"Lieutenant Tippe, Leo E."

"Here. . . ."

He continued on down the list of names, calling each one sharply.

"All right, men, get aboard. We're taking off."

Slowly I filed through the narrow opening, hesitant and overly polite. Wordlessly the steward pointed toward my seat and I flopped down in its deep leather cushions, my flight jacket folded over my crossed arms.

"Fasten y'r seat belt, sir," he mumbled.

Tugging at my seat belt, I heard him slam the door behind me and saw him go forward rapidly to the flight deck.

In a moment the slumbering seaplane came violently to life as one, then two and three and four engines caught hold quickly and roared into their warm-up. I lay my head back on the leather headrest. Slowly we floated forward as the engines increased their turbulent roar. We plowed deeply into the angry Pacific as it slapped angrily at the metal hull of the Coronado. As we gathered speed, the pounding became less loud and insistent and we skimmed along the surface faster and more buoyantly. With a tremendous thrust the plane leaped into the air, freeing itself victoriously of the last, dripping vestige of salt water. We steadily climbed high into the heavens and headed certainly, resolutely eastward. . . .

I lay stretched out comfortably, at peace with the world, on the bunk in the transient officers' quarters where Savage and I had been assigned a room by the naval air station on Hawaii. The bullet-ripped walls of the stuccoed exterior were a mute, forceful reminder of that fateful December 7th more than three years before. With my eyes, I drew mental pictures of a small, tasty filet mignon and cold, frosted glasses of whiskey and coke. My mouth watered.

"Joe," I said, springing from the bed, "I don't know about

you, but I'm headin' for a little place called the Willard Inn. It's down on Waikiki Beach and I know the captain who runs it. I was there on my way out."

I gazed thoughtfully out the window. "I can get a nice little filet mignon there for a price that's not too unreasonable, and before dinner I can sit out on the terrace and grab drinks by the fistful off a tray when the waiter comes by. A native band beats hell out of some tom-toms and generally goes berserk and, by God, I think it's just what I need before I crawl on that plane tomorrow. You wanna go?"

"No, Snyder," he replied amicably. "I'm gonna grab a bite to eat out here and come back and get to bed. Thanks a million just the same."

"It's O.K., Joe. But you don't know what you're missin'."

Alone, I sauntered into the arbor-covered terrace of the Inn. Casually I glanced around at the afternoon drinkers. The same sprinkling of navy and marine officers was there, and interspersed among them were some bronzed Hawaiian girls. I sat down calmly at a table in a far corner, pulling my chair under me carefully. Listening to the same pulsating, frenzied music that I had heard months ago, I looked around at the people at each table.

As my eyes wandered slowly from table to table, I thought I saw a brown, slim hand dart down swiftly to slide a yellow flowered dress up over the knees of a pair of soft, shapely, browned legs. I glanced back quickly. My eyes traveled slowly, thoughtfully, up the yellow dress to the face of an attractive, browned girl sitting with a table full of naval officers. She had a cocoa-colored skin, sparkling brown eyes and black wavy hair. Her cheeks were smooth and round, without make-up, and her lips were full and pouted with suggestive wickedness. As I looked steadily in her direction, she turned her head coyly toward me and flashed me an impish smile. Her face looked strangely familiar, but too much water had passed under the bridge for me to place her definitely. Her head turned back away from me and I lit a cigarette thoughtfully, trying to figure out

whom she looked like. I sat there looking at her back and profile when she turned back again, smiling prettily. An incorrigible little flirt, I mused.

Then it came to me like a flash! My God, that's the same little wench that the sailor and marine got in a fight over, months ago on this same terrace. Swiftly, I realized that though I had been helping to fight a war, the surging emotions of peacetime went on and on. I got up and pulled my chair around so that I faced away from the brown beauty and out towards the street.

Suddenly I felt a tremendous weight lift from my shoulders as though an omniscient God had gently and carefully taken it away. The things that I had felt were important and which thousands of men had been fighting for and against—life, death, food, drink and the hundreds of little taken-for-granted things—were left behind me on that little atoll in the Pacific. For an instant I felt horribly depressed and sick to my stomach. Then a faint glow of desperate elation swept over me; and I quickly realized that it was not for me to ponder and plan, nor to reason and attempt to arrive at what was good or bad or right or wrong. It simply fell to the lot of my kind to fight and try to live and keep from dying, and not to wonder too much nor ask too many questions. In this war, that was what my generation was meant for and that was the reason for its being.

A waiter brushed me as he hustled by, precariously balancing a tray full of drinks.

"Boy," I said in a tired, thin voice, "set that tray down here and tell me how much it costs. I'm going to stop being uncivilized right now."

He looked at me hard, sorting out his change, as I began to down the first drink.







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